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Hot Spots, Avatars, and Narrative Fields Forever—

Buñuel's Legacy for New Digital Media and Interactive Database Narrative

Buñuel learned the fetishizing power of discreet objects from his early days as a Catholic, a lesson that stayed with him all his life.

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Proleptic Pleasures

One of the pleasures in working on Buñuel is that each time you return to his films, you discover they are further ahead of you than you previously thought, which keeps them perpetually at the cutting edge. I think it is partly because he was able to leverage the most radical dimensions of his sources, whether it was the subversive potential of Spanish picaresque fiction or the political corrosiveness of Freud's dreamwork theory and the Surrealist movement it helped spawn. That's why his vision of Freud influenced Lacan—a link that generated Linda Williams' poststructuralist Buñuel in her 1981 study, *Figures of Desire*, and why almost 20 years later Victor Fuentes could make a convincing case for a postmodernist Buñuel.[1] And why in 1978 Susan Suleiman found Buñuel's *The Phantom of Liberty* an illuminating analog for Román Jakobson's structuralist approach to narrative, and why 20 years after that James Tobias treated his narrative networks as an equally productive analog to the cognitive networks of Marvin Minsky.[2]

I want to propose a new context—the convergence between cinema and new digital media—to explore Buñuel's legacy for conceptualizing interactive database narratives and their discreet pleasures, which has been my own primary interest for the last few years and the context in which I have recently been teaching his films. A number of other filmmakers known for their experimentation with nonlinear narrative, such as Chris Marker, Alain Resnais, Agnès Varda, Peter Greenaway, and Raúl Ruiz, have already chosen to refigure the lines of their earlier experimentation through this analogy with new digital interactive forms. I am thinking specifically of Marker's CD-ROM *Immemory* (1999) and his film *Level 5* (1999, where the protagonist is an interface designer working on an electronic game about the Battle of Okinawa), both of which return to the kinds of issues he addressed in pre-digital database films like *La Jetée* (1962) and *Sans soleil* (1982). And of Resnais's pair of multi-branching films, *Smoking/NoSmoking* (1993), based on the eight plays that comprise Alan Ayckbourn's *Intimate Exchanges* (1982), which address many of the temporal issues he had explored earlier in *Last Year in Marienbad* (1961). And of Varda's *The Gleaners and I* (2000), a documentary with a database structure that uses a DV camera to "glean" a fascinating collection of rural and urban scavengers living off the surplus waste of a consumerist culture. In the process, the filmmaker proves to be the most accomplished gleaner of all, especially as she recycles techniques and issues that have preoccupied her from *La Pointe courte* (1954) to *Vagabond* (1985). I also think of Greenaway's continuing experiments with database structure from *The Falls* (1981) to *The Pillow Book* (1997). And of Ruiz's hypertext project at Duke University, which affected his recent adaptation of Proust in *Time Regained* (2000). I am not saying that if Buñuel were still alive he would be following a similar path, but that his radical experimentation provides equally productive strategies for advancing the art of interactive narrative in new digital forms. For, like Jo Labanyi, I think Buñuel's avant-garde practice has always had strong lines of continuity with certain popular forms of mass culture.[3]

Buñuel has hardly been considered a lover of new technology. In his final essay, "Pessimism" (written in Spanish in 1980, three years before his death), he dubbed "technology, science, and information" (along with the population explosion) the four horsemen of the apocalypse that now threaten to destroy the world, and warned, "The glut of information has also brought about a serious deterioration in human consciousness today." For these reasons, he concluded, "Filmmaking seems to me a transitory and threatened art [because] it is very closely bound up with technical developments."[4] Yet Buñuel always believed "a change of forms"—whether in narrative structures or in seemingly trivial etiquette—could potentially become "revolutionary" because any system of conventions "guarantees the survival of the oppressive system."[5] Whenever a new medium comes along, it provides an opportunity for a dramatic change in formal conventions, which was one reason why the modernist Buñuel was so drawn to cinema. So why not explore this potential for radical change in new digital media?

Perhaps the best evidence for the compatibility between these new media and Buñuel's own experimentation is "A Giraffe," his description of a proposed

conceptual sculpture that was published in *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution* (vol. 6, May 15, 1933). Describing it as a life-sized giraffe cut from a simple wooden board, Buñuel claims that "the peculiarity that sets it apart" are its 20 spots, which function like digital "hot spots" in an interface design for an interactive installation.

> Each of its spots, which from ten or twelve feet away look perfectly ordinary, is actually formed either by a lid that each viewer can easily open by rotating it on a small hinge placed invisibly on one side, or by an object, or by a hole revealing the light of day . . . or by a concavity containing the various objects detailed in the following list. It should be noted that this giraffe doesn't make complete sense until its full potential is realized, that is to say, until each of its spots performs the function for which it was intended.[6]

That is, until it becomes truly interactive. Once you know about Buñuel's database of 20 objects (each of which delivers a powerful surrealistic jolt), you realize this piece could be fully realized only in the imagination or in cyberspace. Yet some of the items evoke specific images from his films.[7] For example, in spot #4, through a small grate ("like that of a prison"), . . . "we hear a real orchestra of one hundred musicians playing the overture to *Die Meistersinger*"—an image he later tried to insert in *Los olvidados*. And in spot #12, we see "a very beautiful photo of the head of Christ with a crown of thorns, but ROARING WITH LAUGHTER," which prefigures an image he would later use in *The Milky Way*. Spots #2 and 17 assault the viewer's vision—as Buñuel had already done in *Un Chien andalou* and was to do again in *El*. Yet these assaults in "Giraffe" are more interactive, and thus impossible to achieve in cinema, where the spectator is more protected from the artist's rudeness and wrath.

> In the second [spot]: on the condition that it is opened at noon . . . , we find ourselves in the presence of a cow's eye in its socket, with eyelashes and eyelid. The image of the viewer is reflected in the eye. The eyelid must suddenly close, putting an end to our contemplation . . . . (45)

> In the seventeenth: a powerful jet of steam will gush from the spot at the moment it opens and horribly blind the viewer. (48)

Though most of the 20 spots operate on a simple binary of opening and closing, some suggest the illusion of a limitless database, which makes them not only surreal but also ideally suited for a digital database narrative.

> In the nineteenth: behind the spot, a model less than three feet square representing the Sahara Desert under a crushing light. Covering the sand, a hundred thousand miniature Marists made of wax, their white aprons detaching from their cassocks. In the heat, the Marists melt little by little. (Many millions of Marists must be kept on reserve.) (48)

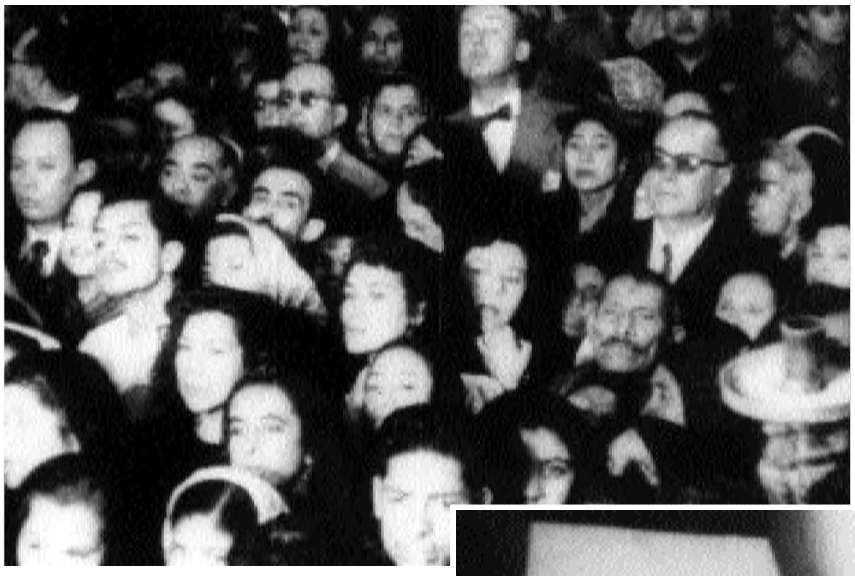
While Buñuel's proposed Giraffe could serve as an interface design for creating an interactive VR installation, I find it more productive to use it as a blueprint for adapting his filmic experimentation to cyberspace.

Clarifying Terms

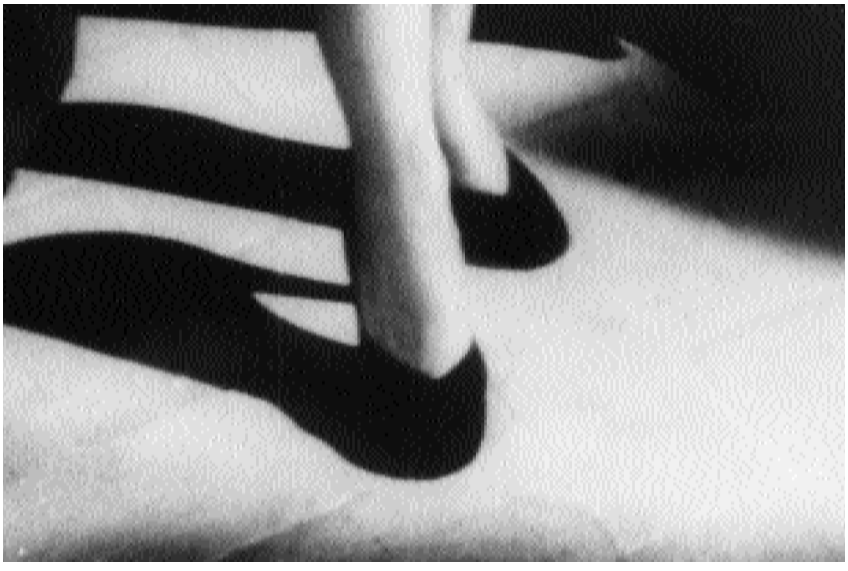
By *"new" digital media*, I am referring loosely to several forms without making any attempt to address their significant differences (which would require another essay): the Internet, electronic games, CD-ROMs, DVDs, DVD-ROMs, VR environments, and interactive installations. All of these media can function as vehicles for transmitting narratives, but they are also capable of serving other nonnarrative functions.

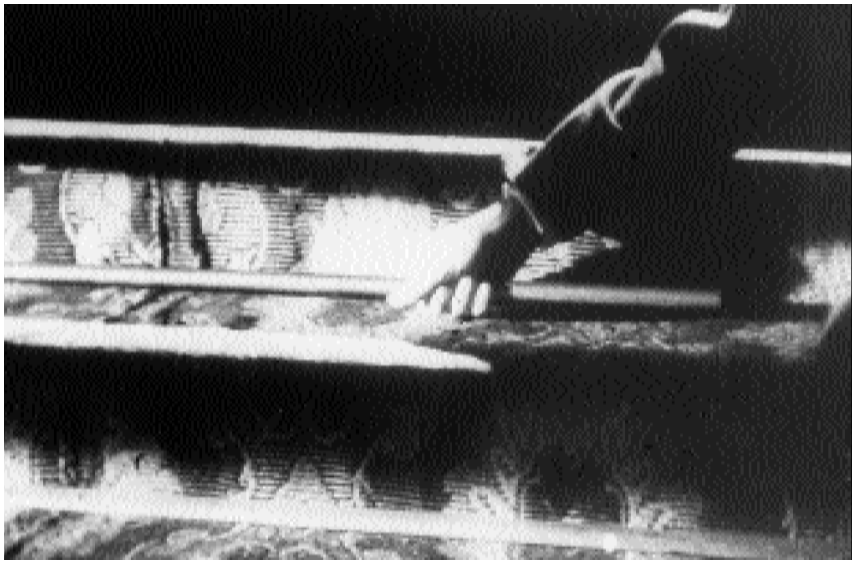
Interactivity is harder to clarify because it wavers between two poles. While all narratives are in some sense interactive in that their meanings always grow out of a collaboration between the idiosyncratic subjectivities of authors and audiences and the reading conventions of the respective cultures they inhabit and languages they speak, all interactivity is also an illusion because the rules established by the designers of the text necessarily limit the user's options. Interactivity thus tends to function as a normative term—either fetishized as the ultimate pleasure or demonized as a deceptive fiction. Even those who fetishize it, like new media theorists Sandy Stone and Andy Lippman (who define it as a "mutual and simultaneous activity on the part of both participants, usually working toward some goal"), acknowledge the need to create the illusory "impression" of an infinite database (like Buñuel's millions of Marists) from which the user's choices are actually being drawn.[8]

One productive way of avoiding these two extremes (of fetishizing or demonizing interactivity) is to position the user or player as a "performer" of the



In *El*, Don Francisco's tormented narrative of "amour fou" is launched during a Catholic Mass for Holy Week, when he picks a particular object for fetishization out of a database (which we viewers are also able to scan). He singles out not a face from the crowd (though that option is clearly visible, left), but rather a particular pair of black pumps from a full line-up of shoes (below).





Whenever Don Francisco experiences an emotional outburst, he finds an object at hand to intensify his feelings, as in this staircase scene where he expresses his insane jealousy by beating the steps with an iron bar in a masturbatory rage.

One of the most potent hot spots in *El* is the fetishizing close-up of the initial transgressive kiss between Don Francisco and Gloria, which is followed by a big-bang explosion that not only figuratively suggests an orgasmic climax but also quite literally ruptures the film's narrative coherence both temporally (several months forward) and spatially (from Mexico City to the dam-construction site).

narrative—like an actor interpreting a role or a musician playing a score, contributing her own idiosyncratic inflections and absorbing the experience into her own personal database of memories. Although any performance is at least partly structured by the text, it is also affected by the repertoire of past performances (by this player and others) within this particular genre, medium, and culture.This approach works particularly well with Buñuel's films, where multiple characters and actors frequently compete for the same role. By privileging interactivity, new digital media and their critical discourse encourage us to rethink the distinctive interactive potential of earlier narrative forms, which is precisely what I am doing here in the case of Buñuel's cinema.

Database narratives refers to narratives whose structure exposes or thematizes the dual processes of selection and combination that lie at the heart of all stories and that are crucial to language: the selection of particular data (characters, images, sounds, events) from a series of databases or paradigms, which are then combined to generate specific tales. You can find this structure in a wide range of works from European art films created under the influence of narratology (like *The Saragossa Manuscript*, *La Jetée*, *Sans soleil*, *Last Year at Marienbad*, *Eden and After*, *Celine and Julie Go Boating*, *Three Crowns of a Sailor*, *The Falls*, and *Toute une nuit*) to experimental documentaries (like Pat O'Neill's *Water and Power*, José Luis Guerin's *Innisfree* and *Train of Shadows*, Péter Forgács's *Maelstrom* and *The Danube Exodus*, and Agnès Varda's *The Gleaners and I*) to more mainstream independents influenced by cyberfiction (like *Slacker*, *Groundhog Day*, *Pulp Fiction*, *Lost Highway*, *The Matrix*, *Run Lola Run*, and *Time Code*).[9] Such narratives reveal the arbitrariness of the particular choices made, and the possibility of making other combinations which would create alternative stories. By always suggesting virtu-

ality and the wave of potentialities linked to the uncertainty principle, such narratives inevitably raise meta-narrative issues.

This definition is amazingly consistent with Buñuel's own "synoptic table of the American cinema," a bizarre document he allegedly constructed when he was in Hollywood trying to "learn some good American technical skills," and which he describes in his autobiography, *My Last Sigh*:

> There were several movable columns set up on a large piece of pasteboard: the first for "ambience" (Parisian, western, gangster, etc.), the second for "epochs," the third for "main characters," and so on. Altogether there were four or five categories, each with a tab for easy maneuverability. What I wanted to do was show that the American cinema was composed along such precise and standardized lines that, thanks to my system, anyone could predict the basic plot of a film simply by lining up a given setting with a particular era, ambience, and character.[10]

In contrast to the predictability of Hollywood movies, Buñuel's films (like most of the database narratives listed above) are full of surprising ruptures that reveal the radical potential of the underlying database structure that usually lies hidden behind the story. His films also demonstrate that dreams are the ultimate model of interactive database narrative, for they always rely on a dialectic play between the disruptive power of those seemingly random, absurd sensory percepts (those jarring objects out of context that deliver a surrealistic jolt) and a repressive narrative drive that locks them into conventional structures by imposing chains of causality.

One of the most radical lessons that Buñuel and other Surrealists learned from Freud was the censoring function of the narrative impulse in dreamwork—that process of secondary revision which is operative both within the dream experience itself and also within the interpretive act the morning after. For this narrativizing process distracts the dreamer away from the most subversive meanings of the dream—those discrete percepts (both visual images and sounds) that threaten to explode all master narratives and their authorizing regimes of religion, nationality, and class. Here is how Buñuel described the process in 1958, in a passage reminiscent of his description of the cow's eye which appeared in the second spot of his Giraffe:

> Octavio Paz once said, "A chained man need only shut his eyes to be able to make the world explode"; paraphrasing him, I would add: the white eyelid of the screen need only reflect the light that is its own to blow up the universe.[11]

It is in the ruptures *between* the images that this radical explosion is detonated—an explosion that is made quite literal in that crucial moment in *El* when a transgressive kiss between Don Francisco and Gloria (his best friend's fiancée) blows the linear narrative apart. That is why when we watch a Buñuel film we are always engaged in a struggle—between on the one hand a vigilant attentiveness to disruptive objects and disjunctive sounds and on the other a submissive subordination of them to the normalizing narrative drive that neutralizes their subversive power by confining them within a conventional linear story bound by cause and effect. In those films where the narrative impulse *appears* to prevail—as in his early sound films at Filmófono, his movies made in Mexico (even including *El* and *Exterminating Angel*), and those he made in Spain (*Viridiana* and *Tristana*), and also *Belle de jour*—the perception of those disruptive objects and sounds is all the more subversive because it suddenly threatens to unravel the entire narrative fabric. But in his more blatantly radical films, like *Un Chien andalou*, *L'Age d'or*, *Land Without Bread*, *The Milky Way*, *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie*, and above all, *The Phantom of Liberty*, the narrative drive itself is obviously ridiculed. In his final film, *That Obscure Object of Desire*, the two sides (the disruptive percepts and the narrative drive) seem perfectly balanced and complementary, for both are equally apparent and both equally ridiculed. For example, our attention is pointedly drawn to absurd objects—such as Don Mateo's burlap sack, whose mysterious contents are compromised by his servant's misogynistic remark that all women are bags of shit; the empty chair that calls attention to Conchita's absence and its powerful impact on the pining Don Mateo; her chastity belt that both frustrates and inflames his desire; and the torn and bloodied lace that is being mended by the woman in the shop window just before the final terrorist explosion brings the movie to an abrupt halt. But we are also constantly reminded of the relentless narrative impulse that drives both Don Mateo's erotic obsession with Conchita and his compulsion to recount it to his traveling companions on the train, including the pompous dwarf psychiatrist, whose deft secondary revision fails to shrink or bind Don Mateo's

That Obscure Object of Desire: Balancing the disruptive percepts and the narrative drive by drawing attention to absurd objects.

amour fou, no matter how hard this perceptive little performer tries.

By privileging the disruptive power of sensory percepts over the normalizing drive of secondary revision, Buñuel's films reveal that so-called master narratives are neither inevitable nor natural but, like all stories, mutable. Thus the vast reservoir of databases from which their narrative elements are drawn proves to be a powerful repository for social and revolutionary change.

Although they cannot all be discussed here, looking at some of Buñuel's strategies will be helpful in attempting to rethink the radical potential of interactive database narratives.

1) On the level of narrative drive: the reliance on incongruous objects or *hot spots*, rather than montage, as the primary means of navigating from one scene or discursive level to another;

2) On the level of characterization: the use of puppet-like *avatars* who are not restricted by traditional notions of consistency, psychology, or narrative logic, but whom we nonetheless find fascinating, engaging, and illuminating;

3) On the level of plot: the creation of a *narrative field* where story possibilities seem limitless, where randomness, repetition, and interruptions are rampant, and where search engines are motored by desire.

These strategies and their distinctive pleasures could, I believe, potentially enrich and complicate the narrative impulse in cyberspace, which unfortunately is still fairly crude. In conference after conference on interactive storytelling, the same question keeps being raised without being answered: How can we create engaging interactive narratives that provide an array of pleasures both emotional and intellectual, that don't have clear-cut beginnings or endings and are full of interruptions, and that still offer a satisfying sense of drama and still make us want to return to them again and again? Buñuel's films provide compelling answers to these questions, primarily because he enables us to see what's at stake ideologically in his formal ruptures from conventional practices. This is the kind of perception that is sorely lacking in cyberspace, despite all the utopian rhetoric about self-authoring and its so-called democratic decentering of master narratives and power.

1. Hot Spots, Warp Zones, and Surrealistic Jolts

To achieve subversive ruptures, Buñuel relies not primarily on montage but rather on common objects or incongruous details in an inappropriate setting that function as hot spots with considerable transgressive power.

> The editing, which puts together scenes shot randomly and brings unity to the film, is a matter of no more than two or three days. By contrast, the details of the shots are developed while filming, with the ongoing aim of breaking up the evolution of each scene, of creating ruptures.[12]

This form of surrealistic jolt, which is also operative in painting and poetry and is constitutive to the structure of dreams, is most disruptive within a naturalistic medium like photography or film, where the representational illusion of reality is potentially most convincing. That's why Buñuel wanted to insert a symphonic orchestra into an abandoned tenement in his so-called neorealist film *Los olvidados*, where (if his producer had allowed it) it would have ruptured the line between social classes as well as the line between source and non-source music. By noticing such beastly incongruities—like the rubber rat dropping from the ceiling as the bourgeois Don Mateo pays off Conchita's mother in *That Obscure Object of Desire*, or the lone bear lumbering through the elegant mansion in *Exterminating Angel*, or the cow lounging on the heroine's luxurious bed and the peasant's ox cart driving through the opulent party in *L'Age d'or*, or the piano with bloody carcasses and appended priests restraining the lecherous hero in *Un Chien andalou*, or the sign reading "S.A.D.E., c.v." outside the engineer's office in *El*—the spectator not only gets a laugh but also realizes there is something terribly wrong with this picture. Or, as the narrator of *Land Without Bread* puts it upon noticing a strange portrait of an aristocrat on the wall of an impoverished school room, "Why is this absurd picture here?" By creating cracks in the bourgeois social order, such questions denaturalize all official demands for logic, unity, and symmetry and all civilized prohibitions and distinctions that protect them. Like

The cow on the bed in *L'Age d'or* is one of Buñuel's most notorious incongruous objects, helping to transform the heroine's bedroom into a warp zone that transports her directly into the realm of desire.

the empowering mushrooms, stars, and keys frequently encountered in video games, the more of these incongruous objects you "get," the more empowered you are to challenge the boss and beat the game.

In Buñuel's most radical films, he uses these objects as interface devices—that is, as "hot spots" or "warp zones" which enable the story, camera, character, or spectator to move from one scene or narrative realm to another—a strategy that creates the illusion of narrative cohesion even when the film has little or no plot. He himself observed: "There was no narrative line in *Un Chien andalou*, and in *L'Age d'or* there was, a type of narrative very similar to that in *The Phantom of Liberty*, one that passes from one thing to another through some small detail."[13]

At times an attentiveness to such details provides a temporary means of escape, as in *Exterminating Angel*, where it enables the bourgeois guests to flee the mansion through a ritual of repetition that depends on their being able to remember exactly how the characters and furniture were positioned when the nightmare of entrapment began. A similar kind of mastery of details is demanded in popular exploratory computer games like *Myst*. In *Belle de jour*, the sounds of screeching cats or the bells of a horse-drawn carriage provide entry into erotic fantasies; and in *El*, *Mexican Bus Ride*, *Diary of a Chambermaid*, *Discreet Charm*, and *That Obscure Object*, a series of cars, trains, and buses functions as narrative vehicles that transport characters and spectators to new twists in the story.

In one scene in *The Phantom of Liberty*, common objects like polished shoes and a friendly dog are alternative options for the camera's scrutiny and for ways of navigating to the next scene, but we can never be certain whether, if either had been chosen, it would have led us to the same sniper sequence that follows, where the choice of scrutiny (both for the camera and rifle) proves a matter of life and death. Occasionally, common objects even function as time machines, as the clothes by the river do in *The Milky Way*, enabling the narrative to jump across centuries—a far more modest and amusing way of spanning time than the famous matched cut from bone to spaceship in *2001: A Space Odyssey*, Stanley Kubrick's expensive sci-fi epic released the previous year. Buñuel claims:

> The important thing is that I used any detail to travel from one time period to another. For example: two students from another time participate in the scene in which a bishop who had been a heretic is going to be burned. . . . Everyone wants to apprehend the students, who flee. They run away, get to a river, find the clothes of some present-day hunters who are swimming, put the clothes on and suddenly we have them in our times.[14]

In *The Phantom of Liberty*, one function of the recurring image of Goya's famous painting, *The Third of May, 1808*, is to serve as a hot spot that emphasizes the analogy between the shooting of guns and cameras, for each can be used to choose a privileged target out of an array of possible victims or subjects.

Within the grammar of Hollywood continuity editing, cutting on motion prevents the viewer from noticing the rupture, but Buñuel's attentiveness to the fetishized detail *within* the shot actually accentuates the break. Or, as he puts it more concretely, "It means the audience must pay attention to the time travel."[15]

By repeatedly calling attention to these objects, frequently in close-up (like those interactive "hot spots" on the giraffe), Buñuel shows how they become fetishized: "I like surprises to provoke laughter, and I've made much use of objects, and of the fetishism they inspire, to create a comic effect."[16] His use of fetishizing close-ups (like those of the chicken feet and washable rubber virgin in *Exterminating Angel*, or of the bare feet and high-heeled pumps in the opening sequence of *El*) is so powerful because he shows how this dynamic functions in the three interlocking realms of religion, sex, and consumerism—particularly as embodied in the rituals and relics of Catholicism, in Freud's linking of primary process thinking with the dynamics of erotic desire, and in Marx's theorizing of "commodity fetishism." What Buñuel also makes us see is how skillfully Hollywood melodrama mobilizes these fetishistic pleasures from all three realms. Even in the 1920s he acknowledged, "In a well-made film, the act of opening a door or seeing a hand—an enormous monster—pick up an object can encompass an authentic and novel beauty. It's always the same scenario that the Americans give us, and it's the one that always seems newest. A wonderful miracle of loaves and fishes!"[17] But if detached parts of the human body are fetishized, can the total objectification of characters and actors be far behind?

2. Avatars and Semi-Intelligent Agents

In cyberspace, intelligent agents are objects programmed with a repertoire of behavior that enables them to simulate human beings. In Buñuel's fictions, conversely, we frequently find semi-intelligent agents —human actors who are manipulated and objectified like puppets and whose behavior is not necessarily bound by consistency, psychology, or narrative logic. According to Buñuel,

> A movie actor is born, not made. A film, when all is said and done, is composed of segments, a remnant of poses which, taken as such, separately and arbitrarily, are utterly banal, divested of logical meaning, of psychology, of literary transcendence. In literature, a lion or an eagle can represent many things, but on the screen they are only two animals and nothing else.[18]

This approach to characterization (which is consistent with the Spanish literary tradition of *esperpento*[19]) in no way implies that Buñuel underestimated the crucial contribution of actors. It merely means that like Hitchcock he valued them as objects.[20] "Cinema acts directly upon the viewer in presenting concrete beings and things, isolating him in silence and darkness from what we might call his normal 'psychic habitat.'"[21] This view of characters and actors is also consistent with Michael Wood's point about the tormented, tormenting women played by Catherine Deneuve in *Tristana* and *Belle de jour*, whom we viewers must take an interactive role in imagining.[22]

Like the avatars in most electronic games, the characters in Buñuel's films are not unified three-dimensional characters with whom you can easily slip into a comfortably stable identification. Rather they confront us with their absurd inconsistencies (like the virginal valkyrie in *Exterminating Angel* or the laughing Jesus in *The Milky Way*) and violent contradictions (like the sympathetic would-be killer Archibaldo in *Ensayo de un crimen* and the deranged moral paragon Don Francisco in *El*), which in turn forces us to confront what is at stake in choosing such absurd avatars—as mobile phantoms to represent us, as fetishized icons to worship, or as obscure objects to desire. Buñuel exposes the power dynamics behind this casting system, which arbitrarily decides which woman will play servant or mistress in *Susanna* and *Diary of a Chambermaid*; or which prostitute will service the masochistic john in *Belle de jour*; or which actress will represent Conchita in *That Obscure Object of Desire*; and which actor the Commissioner of Police in *The Phantom of Liberty*, and which dope dealer the framing dreamer in *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie*. This unpredictable casting extends even to the extras, whose database is occasionally invaded by Buñuel (a deviation unheard-of in electronic action games, where extras are usually anonymous enemies who can be shot on sight without guilt or regret), and also to a chain of offscreen narrators, whose incarnation (as in *Phantom*) can at any time be exposed.

Thus, as in most electronic fictions (but few movies), we clearly see that characters function not as individuals but as subject positions, which are defined by history, culture, and genre, and which are only temporarily occupied by individual players or actors chosen from a database by those in charge. Whereas most

game designers have commercial motives for this approach, Buñuel gives ideological reasons:

> The personal story, the private individual drama, cannot, in my opinion, interest anyone who is truly alive to his time; if the viewer participates in the joys, the sorrows, the anguish of a character on the screen, it can only be because he sees reflected in them the joys, sorrows, and anguish of society as a whole and, therefore, his own.[23]

This decentering of characters also applies to plots.

3. Narrative Fields and Desiring Machines

Instead of presenting coherent stories, Buñuel's most radical films create a narrative field with proliferating possibilities, which seem to be drawn (sometimes at random) from databases that are made to appear unlimited yet somehow still immanent in the text. Thus we are rarely concerned with how the story begins or ends, a choice which always seems rather arbitrary—not only in radical works from *Un Chien andalou* and *L'Age d'or* to *Phantom* and *That Obscure Object*, but also in Buñuel's most naturalistic film, *Los olvidados*. Framed by a pair of distopic databases, the film opens with a prologue in which the setting of Mexico City is literally plucked from a menu of urban misery (which also includes New York, London, and Paris), and it closes with the corpse of the young protagonist being dumped on a garbage heap that contains a random collection of refuse and other discarded *olvidados*.

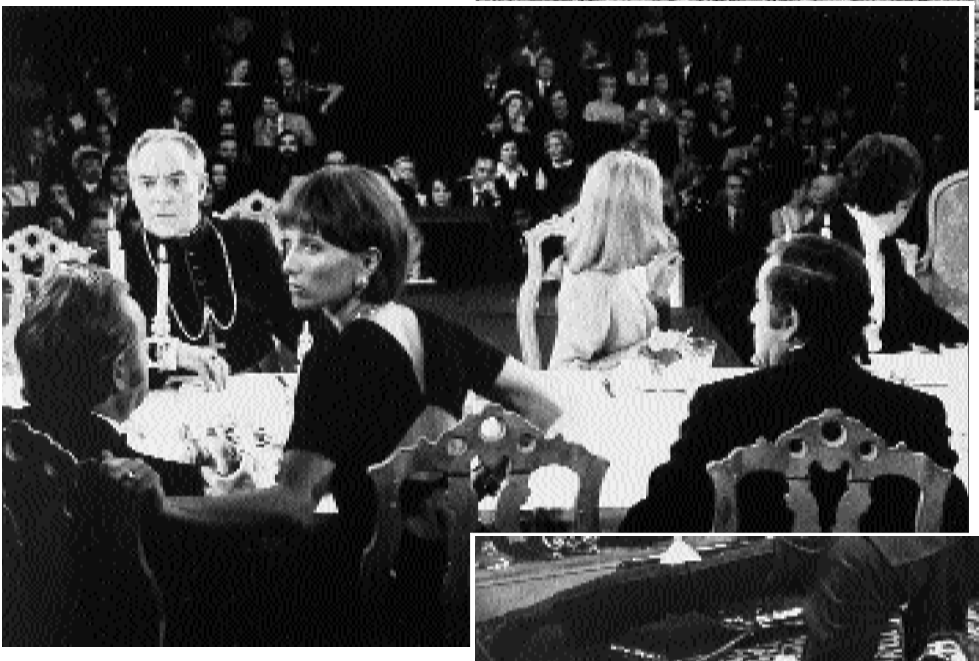
In Buñuel's films (as in picaresque fiction), we focus not on beginnings or endings but on what Peter Brooks calls the "expansive middle . . . a field of force which we read *through*."[24] Although designed to confront interruptions, Buñuel's search engine is always a relentless desiring machine that drives us through this force field. This desiring machine evokes the one described by Deleuze and Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus* even more than those theorized by Brooks or Freud, for it is not restricted to the domestic realm of the patriarchal family, but is a mode of imagination that permits total freedom and is thereby capable of bringing down the entire bourgeois order.[25] Instead of solving who done it or other enigmas in the plot, Buñuel's search engine is concerned with revealing shocking connections within the narrative field while maintaining constant movement, a process which keeps both protagonists and readers alive.

One way Buñuel makes his force field so fascinating is by revealing the databases that underlie the plot. He projects his paradigm onto the syntagmatic plane—a strategy that both Román Jakobson and Roland Barthes saw as a form of semiotic transgression around which a great number of creative innovations are organized.[26] Instead of selecting one alternative from each database and then combining them to create a conventional linear narrative, Buñuel tends to string several alternatives from a single paradigm together as if to simulate a plot. Thus, we find multiple versions of an entrance or conversation in *Exterminating Angel*, or a full array of interrupted dinner parties and dreams in *The Discreet Charm*. Deleuze describes this phenomenon as a time-image, temporalizing the database structure:

> Subjecting the image to a power of repetition-variation was already Buñuel's contribution, and a way of setting time free, of reversing its subordination to movement. . . . *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie* shows less a cycle of interrupted meals than different versions of the same meal in irreducible modes and worlds. . . . It is as if Buñuel's naturalist cosmology, based on the cycle and the succession of cycles, gives way to a plurality of simultaneous worlds; to a simultaneity of presents in different worlds.[27]

Buñuel repeatedly shows how this database narrative structure was already embedded in earlier forms, particularly within picaresque fiction. In a satiric road movie like *The Milky Way*, he imposes *an overarching journey*, which justifies the inclusion of the most incongruous assortment of characters, time frames, and settings plucked from his cherished database of heresies. In *Tristana*, he uses *the branching of forked paths*, where one road leads to violent action (the chase of a rabid dog) and the other to the milder genre of bourgeois romance where the heroine meets her future lover. In *The Discreet Charm*, he repeats *a single abstract trope*—six characters walking down the highway—in three slightly varied versions which, despite their lack of logical connection to any other scenes, serve as markers that divide the rest of the narrative into three discrete acts of approximately equal length.

In his final trilogy of films, we find not only the journey but an entire repertoire of tropes for the database narrative. In *Phantom*, we find *the country inn* (the traditional stopping place in picaresque fiction), where several rooms off the central hallway contain



In *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie*, the main characters are puppet-like avatars who are repeatedly seen strolling/scrolling through an open narrative field (above); and, like paper dolls, are repeatedly recast and redressed as elegant diners in a series of theatrical dinner-party dreams (left); and, like a pack of cards, eventually all fall down, ending as a heap of victims murdered by the Marseilles mob (below).

mini-stories and characters who compete for the narrative space. We also find the narrative trope of *the card game* embedded in one of the rooms, where one woman and four Dominican monks play poker, shuffling the cards into new syntagmatic combinations as they bet Medals, Virgins, and Sacred Hearts, which, like the religious orders, are reduced to paradigmatic suits. And in *The Discreet Charm*, we find *the menu* not only at the chain of interrupted dinner parties but also in the mixing and consuming of martinis, which helps delineate the classes, and at the tea room, where the shortage of beverages is compensated by the rich selection of musical instruments (including the fetishized cello). All of these frustrating menus are also enriched by a lavish array of inset incestuous dreams.

An Oneiric Conclusion

All three strategies I have described are characteristic of dreams, the ultimate model for interactive database narrative. For in dreams, we are nightly bombarded by a random firing of neural signals generated by the brain which the cerebral cortex must interpret. It performs this interpretive task by drawing selections from our internal databases of imagery, which contain virtually everything we have ever experienced and everything we have absorbed from our cultural dreampool, and we reshuffle these selections to generate new combinations that we narrativize when we awaken. We frequently interpret those stories as strategies of survival for ourselves, our culture, and our species—a death-defying narrative venture worthy of both Scheherazade and the Marquis de Sade, two of Buñuel's narrative heroes.

This perspective on dreams gives new resonance to one of the most frequently cited quotes by Buñuel:

> In the hands of a free spirit, the cinema is a magnificent and dangerous weapon. It is the best instrument through which to express the world of dreams, of emotions, of instinct. The mechanism that produces cinematic images is, among all forms of human expression, that which most closely resembles . . . the workings of the mind during sleep.[28]

And that's another reason why Buñuel's radical films, built on the database logic of dreams, provide such a magnificent legacy for conceptualizing interactive narratives and imbuing them with dangerous emotions, instinctual pleasures, and what appears to be an unending supply of unpredictable narrative twists. This perpetual procession of possibilities is held in reserve, like those millions of miniature Marists waiting for the meltdown, their unique moment of martyrdom in the searing Saharan light. Or, to put it more simply, like avatars moving toward hot spots in narrative fields forever.

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Notes

This article was drawn from the "Buñuel 2000" Centenary Conference, held at the University of London, 14-16 September 2000; it also appears in *"Buñuel 2000" Centenary Conference Proceedings*, forthcoming from the Institución Fernando el Católico, Zaragoza.

1. Linda Williams, *Figures of Desire: A Theory and Analysis of Surrealist Film* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1981); and Victor Fuentes, "The Discreet Charm of the Postmodern: Negotiating the Great Divide with the Ultimate Modernist, Luis Buñuel," in *Luis Buñuel's The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie*, ed. Marsha Kinder (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 82-98.
2. Susan Suleiman, "Freedom and Necessity: Narrative Structure in *The Phantom of Liberty*," *Quarterly Review of Film Studies* 3, no. 3 (Summer 1978): 277-96; and James Tobias, "Buñuel's Net Work: Performative Doubles in the Impossible Narrative of *The Phantom of Liberty*," *Film Quarterly*, vol. 52, no. 2 (Winter 1998-99): 10-22.
3. Jo Labanyi, "Buñuel's Cinematic Collaboration with Sáenz de Heredia, 1935-36," paper presented at the "Buñuel 2000" Centenary Conference.
4. "Pessimism," in *An Unspeakable Betrayal: Selected Writings of Luis Buñuel*, trans. Garrett White (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995), pp. 258-63. Yet, in that same essay he acknowledged:
   > I still have a great admiration for American cinema, its actors, its sense of rhythm and action. Its filmmakers have handled with unique mastery a modern art that corresponds very well to the temperament of that people, perhaps because things technical play an essential role there. (259)
5. Agustín Sánchez Vidal, *Luis Buñuel* (Madrid: Editorial Cátedra, 1991), p. 25.
6. "A Giraffe," in *An Unspeakable Betrayal*, p. 44.
7. Ibid., pp. 44-48.
8. Andy Lippman, as quoted by Allucquère Rosanne Stone in *The War of Desire and Technology at the Close of the Mechanical Age* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995), pp. 10-11.
9. For a discussion of *Pulp Fiction* as a database narrative, see my essay, "Violence American Style: The Narrative Orchestration of Violent Attractions," in *Violence and American Cinema*, ed. J. David Slocum (New York: Routledge, 2000), pp. 63-100.

10. Luis Buñuel, *My Last Sigh*, trans. Abigail Israel (New York: Vintage Books, 1984), p. 132.
11. "Cinema as an Instrument of Poetry," in *An Unspeakable Betrayal*, p. 136.
12. "Pessimism," p. 260.
13. Buñuel, as quoted by José De la Colina and Tomás Pérez Turrent in *Objects of Desire: Conversations with Luis Buñuel* (1986), ed. and trans. Paul Lenti (New York: Marsilio Publishers, 1992), p. 22.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid., p. 194.
16. "Pessimism," p. 260.
17. "Variations on Adolphe Menjou's Mustache" (1928), in *An Unspeakable Betrayal*, pp. 114-15.
18. Ibid., p. 114.
19. According to John Hopewell,

    > Characters in Valle-Inclán's esperpento grimace, gesture, grunt, performing mechanically like human marionettes. They are swept along by a tide of misunderstandings, imbecility, chaos. They struggle to transcend the crippling biological, social, psychological and accidental banality of life in general, their present predicament in particular. They fail.

    Out of the Past: Spanish Cinema after Franco (London: British Film Institute, 1986), p. 59.
20. In a recent documentary entitled *Regarding Buñuel* (*A propósito de Buñuel*, 2000), after being told that Hitchcock used to refer to his actors as cattle, Buñuel laughingly responds, "No, they are *cucarachas* [cockroaches]!"
21. "Cinema as an Instrument of Poetry," p. 137.
22. Michael Wood, "Tormentors and Tormented: Buñuel's Women," a paper presented at the "Buñuel 2000" Centenary Conference.
23. "Cinema as an Instrument of Poetry," p. 138.
24. "We can . . . conceive of the reading of plot as a form of desire that carries us forward, onward, through the text. . . . In the motors and engines I have glanced at, including Eros as motor and motor as erotic, we find representations of the dynamics of the narrative text, connecting the beginning and end across the middle and making of that middle—what we read *through*—a field of force." Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (New York: Vintage, 1984), pp. 22, 37, 47.
25. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1972), trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane (New York: Viking Press, 1977).
26. Roland Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero* and *Elements of Semiology*, trans. Annette Lavers and Colin Smith (Boston: Beacon Press, 1970), p. 86.
27. Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image* (1985), trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), pp. 102-3.
28. "Cinema as an Instrument of Poetry," pp. 138-39.

Jean-Pierre Geuens

The Digital World Picture

Not so long ago many of us were still denying what today is a certainty: the demise of film and its replacement by digital technology. Of course we grudgingly recognized that the new medium made editing faster and more exciting, sound recording more malleable to postproduction changes, and visual effects simply astounding, but somehow we still held firm to the notion that the rich texture and the shading palette of the film image could never be overtaken. No longer so: it is now clear that, under the relentless drive of George Lucas and some leading electronic firms, all remaining "film" aspects of cinema, from the origination of the material to its projection in theaters, will soon be propelled into the digital age—ready or not, and sooner rather than later.[1] However, the final triumph of the new technology should not be perceived as anything more than icing on the cake. For all practical purposes, the revolution is already upon us, and we should therefore not shy away from discussion—wild speculation, even—about its impact on the art of cinema.

Certainly the literature associated with the movie industry constantly deluges us with thousands of pages in which we are told of digital breakthroughs that push the envelope further and further.[2] At the same time though, what is said is carefully couched so as not to frighten those who fear being left behind.[3] In *American Cinematographer*, for instance, Lucas himself goes out of his way to reassure cameramen that "aesthetic decisions still have to be made" and "that the essence of what they do—which is to frame a shot and to make sure the lighting is beautiful or appropriate—will always remain the same."[4] Rather than making the members of the technical crew redundant or displacing a part or all of their labor onto a new set of workers operating exclusively behind computers, the new technology is generally presented as just another tool that will, in the end, enhance the creative control of all the parties concerned. Sure, things will be done somewhat differently in the future, but good people will be able to adjust themselves to the changes and easily reposition their skills within the new paradigm.

In my judgment, this view severely understates the radical discontinuity at the core of the digital revolution, insofar as it has it in its power to shatter the long-standing arrangements that regulate how movies come into being. As for theorists, they have been slow to challenge the industry's steady-as-she-goes message, mainly because they have been absorbed by flashier aspects of the technological takeover, and especially everything related to the hypertext.[5] So here I hope to determine the ways by which digital moviemaking changes the rules of the game. I will then attack what I perceive to be the nihilistic tendencies of the new medium; and I will conclude by bringing to light a different use of the technology—one that might take us back from the abyss. In any event, what is presently going on in the field is already shaking our very understanding of what a "film" is.

Changing the Rules of the Game

In "The Question Concerning Technology," Martin Heidegger's main argument is that "technology is no mere means" but rather "a way of revealing" what we then take to be the world.[6] By this Heidegger is suggesting that the kind of technology we use circumscribes our view of the world, earmarking our access to it, ultimately shaping what we make of it. On a lesser scale, it follows that different means of production are not interchangeable either, that new empowering devices do not simply provide a better, more efficient way of doing the same thing. On the contrary, each interjects a distinct filter, an engineered mediation that regulates the labor of those who use it. At the same

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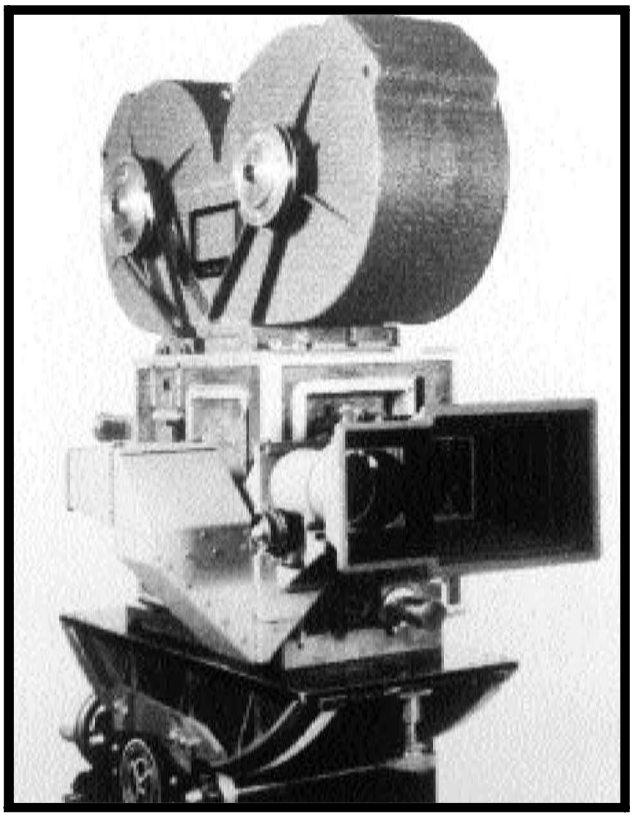
Clockwise from top right: Jeanne Tripplehorn; Saffron Burrows and Kyle MacLachlan; Stellan Skarsgård; and Salma Hayek star (simultaneously, thanks to digital video) in Mike Figgis's *Time Code*.

time, different devices also direct attention toward specific features of the work at hand, channeling expectations toward a desired output and thus, in effect, modulating the final outcome. It should therefore not surprise us that digital moviemaking is not only refashioning our behavior during the entire creative process but also urging us toward certain objectives rather than others.

To understand what is taking place in the shift from film to digital, one first needs to remember what made shooting with film such a unique experience. It was never like any other job. From the start, there was the eeriness of the setting: the cavernous hall with its sacred relics—the hard-shelled camera resting heavily on a solid tripod, the lights with their barn-doors craning down at awkward angles from suspended catwalks, the small microphone perched at the very end of a long pole, the tracks on the floor that started abruptly and led nowhere, the smoke spewing in the air like incense. . . . As for the actual filming, it looked and felt like a ritual whose formalized arrangements had been set long ago. Has anyone ever stood in that setting without being mesmerized by the choreographed ballet involving actors and crew or by the seemingly endless repetition of the exact same lines of dialogue? No wonder then that even hardened veterans felt a sense of awe every time the director called "Action!" For all realized that something magical was bound to take place, and one held one's breath until the call of "Cut!" echoed out. Reality had been exorcised somehow and, if all had gone well, shards of that reality ended up on the surface of the celluloid. At the end of the day, one was exhausted—physically, to be sure, but also mentally—the kind of depletion one feels when something truly transcendental has taken place.

None of this was easy, either, for one was constantly reminded of the dumb opacity and the brute materiality of the medium. For 40-some years, for example, because of the parallax issue in the old cameras, operators could not be certain, until they saw the dailies a day later, that their framing and focusing had been up to par.[7] Lighting too was done blind, and it took years of apprenticeship with experienced directors of photography for newcomers to understand the exact relationship between foot candles and relative levels of exposure in the final image. Even editing, as Walter Murch wistfully recalls, could not be treated lightly in the old days because of the potentially explosive nature of the film's nitrate base.[8] And today still, irrespective of all the technological refinements we take for granted in our modern Arriflex and Panavision cameras, anything can go wrong at any time: witness, for instance, the despair of Andrei Tarkovsky and Sven Nykvist when their principal camera jammed during the shooting of the last, most important, and most expensive scene in *The Sacrifice* (1986).[9] Finally, despite all precautions, a hair on the gate, a light leak in a magazine, or inexplicable mishaps at the lab can still destroy hours and hours of hard work. Yet none of this has ever deterred film crews. In fact, it has always spurred them on, as if they were all measuring their professional worth by going up against these obstacles, learning to overcome them only through meticulous preparations followed by a continuous exercise of exacting craftsmanship. The very difficulty of shooting a film thus brings pride in one's work: much was demanded, it got done, and now one feels good about it. That in a nutshell is what demarcates film work: the sense of magic that permeates the shoot and the sense of accomplishment that comes from working out miracles in the face of incredible odds.



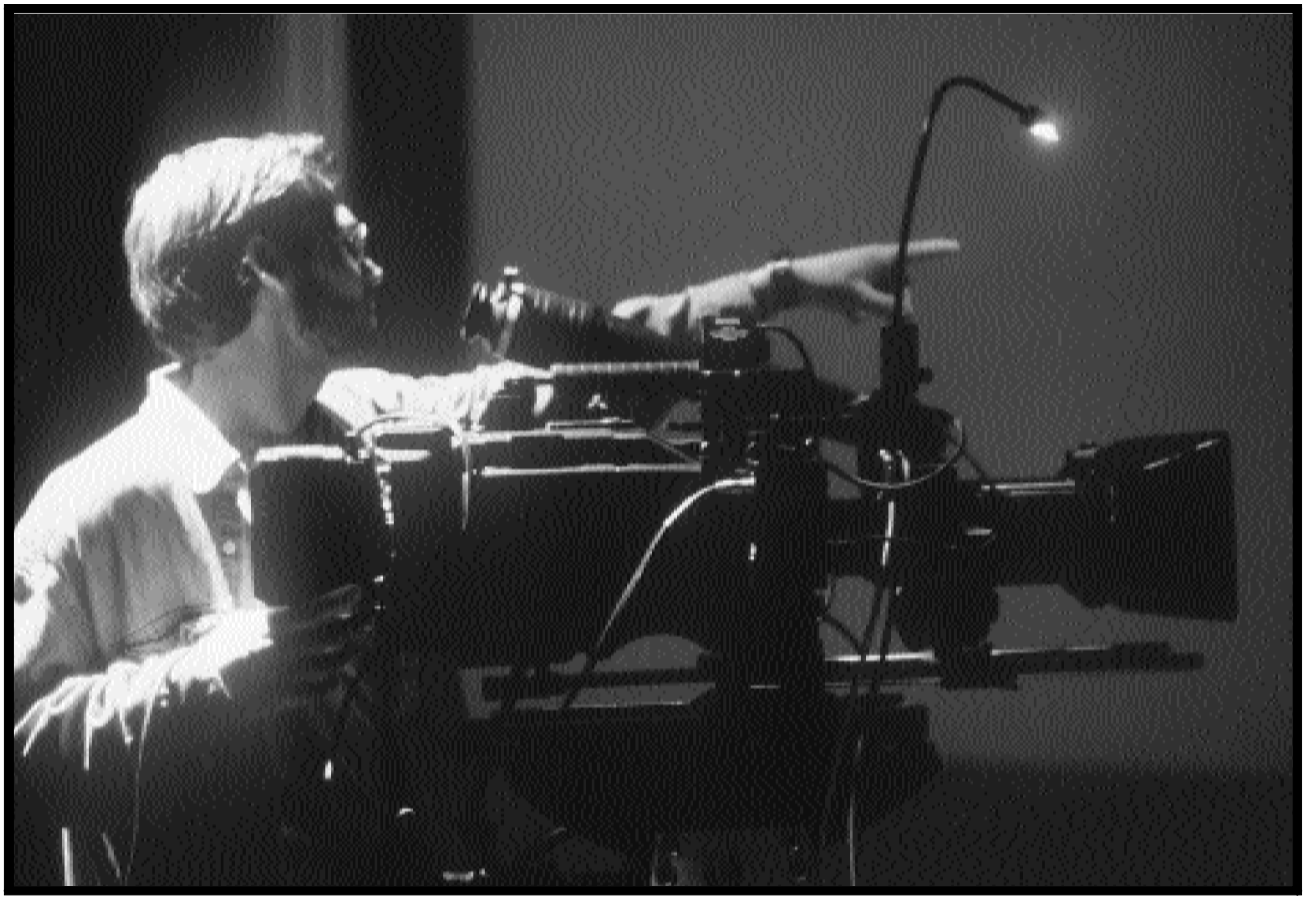
A Technicolor camera, the camera spectacle of yore

By radically simplifying the nature of the shooting process, by bringing transparency to it, digital technology pensions off these heroic features of film. The

image for one is there from the start. It doesn't have to be imagined, produced, begged for, cajoled into existence. It is given immediately. It makes no demands, requires no work. No incantation or rite is necessary to bring it about. It is always already there, once and for all, accessible at all times, and even visitors on the set can make suggestions for its enhancement. Beyond this, it is also cheap, which means that one can easily become careless, shooting endless takes of an action instead of figuring out which one actually works. Even though the work on the set proceeds in more or less the same manner as before, there is a sense that the shoot is too easy, that digital technology demands very little of you and can now be accomplished even with second-rate personnel.[10] So, whereas film heightens everyone's attention and sharpens the work, a lackadaisical response is often the reaction whenever a digital camera makes its appearance.[11] Actors and crew lower their expectations accordingly. The full intense involvement that is the mark of a film shoot has given way to a dispassionate, half-hearted effort on everybody's part.

My second point has to do with the focus inherent in the two technologies. Professional film cameras—the old Mitchells, for instance—were designed to be simple, offering relatively few options beyond the basics. Once speed and shutter had been selected and the various elements of the lens determined, all eyes were meant to concentrate on the action taking place in front of the camera. For that is where the scene is shaped, the material articulated, the film made. Understood this way, motion picture cameras were never more than expensive recording devices.

Digital cameras could not be more different. From the start they beg the operators to try the myriad of options they make available. The exposure can be immediately adjusted to any light level, brightening up even the darkest areas. The colors can be programmed to match whatever light sources are being used or can be extravagantly tweaked for all sorts of expressionistic effects. Tone, grain, contrast, and density can be altered to provide a specific look. Shutter adjustments can be refined to produce stunning visual effects in any



Director Dennis Serras behind the Sony HDW-F900 24P, today's camera spectacle

movement. Fades and dissolves can be adjusted on the spot for maximum impact. A black-and-white look can be substituted for color at any time, and different composition ratios are equally available at a moment's notice. Other filters of lesser appeal stand ready to implement yet other transformations of the image.

Professionals who got their training years ago may regard all this tweaking as gimmicky but, for the tens of thousands of students who are now learning their skills with the help of these cameras, there is no turning back: this is what moviemaking is all about. In the same way that a Moviola feels prehistoric after one has learned editing on an Avid, one cannot be expected to go back to an unadorned scene once filmmaking has been experienced through optical options. Classical film shooting construes the action itself as the focal point of the crew's activity, but digital moviemaking refracts that attention back to the camera. The scene itself is no longer the primary focus; what matters most is the visual mesh that shapes what is going on. Moviemaking has now become a question of looks.

For Lev Manovich, more is involved here than mere attention to the surface of the text: "While previously the great text of culture from which the artist created her or his own unique 'tissue of quotations' was bubbling and shimmering somewhere below the consciousness, now [the entire creative process] has become externalized (and greatly reduced in the process)."[12] In other words, whereas it might have taken years for someone like Mikhail Kalatozov to develop the extraordinary visual style that became his hallmark, today "style" can be purchased from day one by activating a switch on a gizmo. However, these electronic filters have already been processed by the culture at large, hence the very real danger that they could displace or eliminate the less visible, more fragile influences that normally compete in one's artistic development.[13] For Anne-Marie Willis, this may already have taken place, with the consequent result that "imagination becomes reduced to imaging."[14] No longer originating from a filmmaker's head, visual motives are now dependent on the latest hype from the world of cool media imagery.

Then there is digital wizardry per se. Because the pixel revolution made it possible to manipulate any part of the image without loss of resolution or impact on the surrounding area, new image formations suddenly became possible. At first, the digital intervention was subtractive in nature: television antennas were removed from rooftops in historic epics and wires from bodies in stunt work. More dramatic things also occurred: Gary Sinise's leg, for instance, was neatly erased from the rest of his body in *Forrest Gump* (1994). By nature, though, such work always involved the pasting of fresh material onto the blotted-out area, eventually spelling out the full potential of image compositing. All at once, threatening clouds replace the dull sky that greeted actors and crew during the shoot. And, to the delight of cost experts everywhere, a small crowd is magically duplicated to fill an entire stadium. In yet more extraordinary breakthroughs, President Kennedy addressed Mr. Gump, John Wayne came back to life, and Fred Astaire was seen dancing with a vacuum cleaner. Finally, *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?* (Roger Zemeckis, 1988), *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* (James Cameron, 1991), and *Jurassic Park* (Steven Spielberg, 1993) pushed the boundary of the new technology even further, convincing all, filmmakers as well as audiences, that nothing stood beyond its reach.[15] Indeed, in *What Dreams May Come* (Vincent Ward, 1998), the world itself could be remade to reflect the vision of a Timothy Leary on a bad day. From this point on, the filmic image of old with its umbilical cord to the world lost its original primacy. Parts of the image could still originate in a traditional setting, but they could no longer be differentiated from the added photographic layers or the surrounding plastic elements.

Nihilistic Tendencies

The luxuriousness of the new images should not, however, blind us to the underlying disjunction at the core of such projects. To construct a coherent picture out of material gathered from radically different sources (straight photography, composited pictures, computer-generated images, other animated material of one kind or another, etc.) involves a redeployment away from the traditional source of the medium—the world of everyday life. For, even though the turbo-charged images have all the earmarks of a believable ensemble when pasted together, what we see never existed as such. In fact, for Jean Baudrillard, the whole point of the new technology is to substitute "signs of the real for the real itself," with the benefit that "never again will the real have to be produced."[16] And indeed, George Lucas prides himself on having disconnected the medium from "all that real stuff" that repels him so much.[17] So when he and his team digitally alter, animate, or composite people, objects, and landscapes, more than an aesthetic effect is involved. What we face

here rather is a deep distrust of the everyday world, the sense that the "real stuff" is no longer good enough to do the job that is now envisioned for the cinema. By the same token, there is also the fear that any unadorned view might, by its very presence, give the lie to the artifact of which it is asked to be a part. The goal then, in maintaining the integrity of the discourse and in keeping it well-ordered, monologic, and sovereign, is to regulate every bit of reality that is let in so as to erase what doesn't fit and to replace it with more suitable material.

The green screen is at the core of the digital studio. Here actors say their lines and rehearse their moves before being pasted against a pictorial environment of some sort. Today the actors who share a scene generally perform it together, but pick-ups and inserts are most often done solo. The technique in fact no longer requires the simultaneous presence of all the participants, and it is thus doubtful that traditional blocking will survive, as it makes more sense economically to shoot one actor at a time, not just for some exceptional shots, but for all the scenes of a particular actor. To understand the true nature of the process taking place, one needs to imagine the actor standing alone in front of a large green screen, facing camera and crew. There is no furniture around, no other decor or background, and the light that floods the set is not naturalistically motivated. As for the performance, it is addressed to no one, with expressions and gestures without immediate cause or impact. Certainly the actor would have been told beforehand how this particular bit will fit once other players, furniture, light, and backdrop are added to the final plate but, at this very moment, the continuity and the interaction with the living environment which, in John Dewey's eyes, provide us with our sense of identity and our ability to act in the world are simply not there. Indeed for Dewey, in any life experience "there is never any . . . isolated singular object or event. . . . There is always a field in which observation of this or that object or event occurs."[18] Thus for an actor to stand alone in an empty space is very unlike sharing a room with others, being able to take their measure as well as being aware of the exact shape of the furniture, the feel of the carpet, the color of the walls, and the spatial location of every object in relation to one's own body. Most importantly, when we engage another human being, it is not someone in general whom we encounter, a generic personality, but a living body whose unique look, expression, and behavior contribute to our own response. As human beings then, we continuously interact with each other and our surroundings, probing at one moment, reacting at another. In fact, to have what Dewey calls *an* experience, there must be a "complete interpenetration of self and the world of objects or events."[19]

Admittedly the alienating procedure of the green screen may not be particularly troubling to actors accustomed to working in films. They have always had to adjust to the idiosyncrasies of the medium: bringing up their characters piecemeal instead of all at once, being replaced by stunt experts when the action got rough, and addressing lines of dialogue to a vacant point next to the lens instead of a human being. Moreover, as Walter Benjamin pointed out, because "the film actor lacks the opportunity of the stage actor to adjust to the audience during his performance," the acting often turned out to be less than thrilling.[20] As a matter of fact, the lack of context and continuity imposed by the new technology could be used to advantage in another kind of cinema, Godard's for instance, to help deconstruct the actor's usual baggage (the sense of the character's identity, the backstory, the wants and the needs, the knowledge of what's happening, and the consciousness of the main obstacle to one's objective).[21] Here, however, the intention remains trite. The idea is not so much to probe the dialectical struggle between the actor and the character as to generate conventional movie characters. At the very least, with the green screen, the job of the traditional actor is made more difficult. Something important may be left behind. Can one truly expect great performances in such conditions?

Compositing can also infiltrate the very fabric of everything it shows us. Certainly the concept is not new. Henry Peach Robinson, for instance, more than 100 years ago, used combination printing "to avoid the mean, the bare and the ugly . . . to avoid awkward forms and to correct the unpicturesque" in his photographs.[22] Similarly today, a filmmaker can assert control over all the accidental missteps that inevitably slip in during the shooting of a picture and then permeate the very fabric of the text. "Now," Lucas boasts, "you can adjust all that."[23] For Scott McQuire, typical examples would include "a momentary look on an actor's face, a chance configuration of light and shadow, a random juxtaposition of objects. . . ." And he concludes, "It is this realm of contingency that the digital threshold overtakes."[24]

To understand what is truly going on here, we need to take a closer look at Lucas's pioneering work in *Star Wars: Episode I—The Phantom Menace* (1999). For it is in that film that we see rehearsed for the first time the

technological moves that, for better or worse, will redefine our understanding of moviemaking in the not-so-distant future. In one shot, for instance, the dialogue is edited out of an actor's lips by morphing his mouth shut. In a reverse example, dialogue is added to a performance by shooting "someone else's lips . . . and match(ing) [these] lips to new lines of dialogue recorded by the actress."[25] A third situation involves a shot with two actors for which the director "prefer[ed] each actor's performance in different takes."[26] No problem: a brand-new shot is created that combines the separate performances. In yet another scene, the actress (Natalie Portman) was supposed to have looked first at the young Anakin and then at the floor, but unfortunately these actions were reversed in the take finally chosen as the best. The obvious solution involved running some of the footage backwards but, in doing so, some steam rising in the background now appeared to go in the wrong direction. So a further trick was called upon to make the steam rise within the new (reversed) image. Finally, in a digital experimentation that "actually brought tears to my eyes," Martin Smith, the editor of the film, points to a shot in a hangar that takes place before the racing sequence. First, Lucas didn't like the time it took for Anakin to turn his head before reacting to another character's entrance, "so Smith skip-printed some of the boy's head-turning motion and smoothed it out." Then, still in the same shot, because the actress didn't look up to respond to another character's lines, some new footage of her doing so was glued in. But that is not all. Now Lucas wanted to include R2-D2 and C-3PO to the scene and increase the size of the hangar. Again, no problem:

> The camera now makes a synthetic "pan" to the left to reveal the hangar's enormity, the two famous robots entering, and Anakin's racing pod being towed in. ILM had to create the rest of the hangar's dusky interior, with busy robots going about their duties, people walking across frame and a very large hangar opening in the background through which the desert planet's harsh sun light now glares.[27]

The difficulty here involved not so much the added material per se, but the production of a convincing change in the perspective on the characters and the background of the original footage to make them fit the camera's added synthetic pan.

In the face of such tours-de-force, the tendency is to sit back and applaud the technicians who made it possible. More to the point, the surfeit of digital tampering can also suggest the emergence of a radically new "camera" which, to quote Manovich again, no longer "functions as a material object, co-existing, spatially and temporally, with the world it [is] showing us."[28] Put somewhat differently, the brilliant ILM demonstration forces us to rethink the traditional arrangement that gave preeminence to the shoot for the gathering of the core material of the finished film—editing and the rest of postproduction being used merely to fine-tune the work. For Smith, this way of working is "now out of the window."[29] Instead, all phases involving the making of a movie have now merged into one. Not only can one edit and create special effects while on location, one can also rewrite, restage, and reshoot—essentially think the film anew—while editing. The discrete operations have combined into one general interface where all facets of the story as well as of the moviemaking process are accessible and revisable at any time.

The tendency to micromanage every detail in the picture has other ramifications that need to be addressed as well. In hindsight, it was probably inevitable that the actors' faces, bodies, and performances were going to be digitally modulated and enhanced (for our viewing pleasure of course) once compositing work became routine enough. At the very least, the practice displayed in *The Phantom Menace* puts an end to the idealistic notion that the performance we are watching originates with an identifiable human being. At the same time, even though we may not truly be aware of the difference, does not something change in our appreciation of the work once we know that words can leave a person's mouth without ever having entered that person's head, that faces can be altered to meet the exact nuances of the text, and that bodies can be made to enact actions that they never initiated? In other words, what happens to our emotional involvement with characters once we know that the "performing" on the screen owes everything to the talent of a digital animator? Can simulatory reality ever supply the sense of the soul under the skin? Milli Vanilli, anyone?

To shed yet more light upon George Lucas's grand project in the ILM factory, we better return to Heidegger. Indeed, for the German philosopher, "the fundamental event of the modern age is the conquest of the world as a picture."[30] By this Heidegger does not allude to photography, but to our exacerbated drive to "set whatever is, itself, in place before oneself."[31] The notion thus expresses Heidegger's view that late twentieth-century Western civilization has taken a turn for the worse insofar as we now, with the help of technol-

ogy, believe ourselves to be the exclusive "relational center[s] of that which is as such."[32] In other words, our power to make things happen in the world has been boosted to such an extent that we no longer consider people and other entities in nature as others, in their distinctness, with their own underlying reasons, but as objects made to serve us, material to be used at will. The worker is merely a provider of labor; the river a source of energy. In our greedy search for "unlimited power for the calculating, planning, and molding of all things,"[33] and the irresistible pleasure that goes with it, we forget that "that which is does not come into being at all through the fact that man first looks upon it."[34] All in all, for Heidegger, to adopt the technological world view is to wish insatiably to master, control, and dominate whatever is set before us.

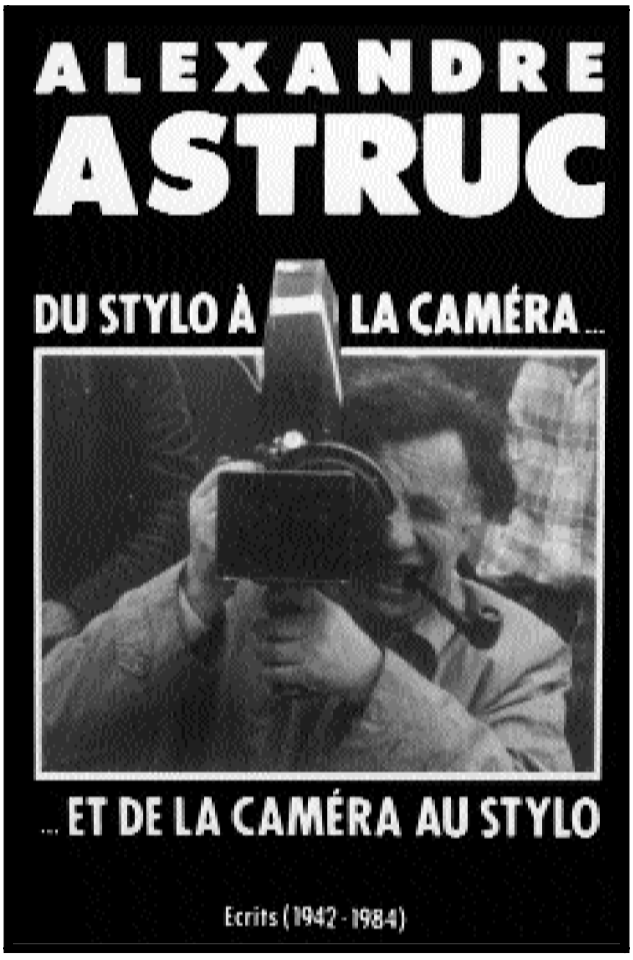
Surely, for Heidegger, the instrumental thinking at the core of Lucas's ideas would be a clear example of a nihilism run amuck, one possibly also "involv[ing] a pathology of the will to power."[35] Appropriately, the *American Cinematographer* article where the director discusses the future of moviemaking is called "Master of His Universe."[36] And in a "Sixty Minutes" segment, Lucas himself is seen in his large screening room, surrounded by a gang of computer animators, pointing a laser beam toward the screen and asking them to realign his army of drones: "Why don't you take this guy and put him over here," and "Take another one like him and stick him over there."[37] Clearly such work points to a new protocol for directors working in the electronic factory, one where anything can be artificially produced or retrieved from an ever-expendable digital backlot, then made to perform exactly as desired. Such directors, no longer embroiled in the complexity, the otherness, and the resistance of the everyday world, would become truly omnipotent, their power absolute.

I thus believe that a dangerous ethos permeates the entire *Phantom Menace* project. In fact, Lucas's drive to lord over everyone and everything in his images, to make them conform to his wishes and to milk every bit of surplus value out of them, is reminiscent of a similar labor performed by the less savory characters of the Marquis de Sade, who also made mincemeat of their victims' bodies, seeing in them but human matter to be played with as long as pleasure was ultimately attained. Certainly, to make use of Marcel Hénaff's thoughts on the subject, there is a "continuity between shattering the organic body, systematically dividing it up, and quantifying it, on the one hand, and methodically rendering it profitable and subjecting it to industrial exploitation on the other."[38] In a similar vein, in Lucas's grandiose enterprise, the integrity, grace, and dimensionality of a human body responding to the surrounding living environment is systematically leveled as its body parts are forced to perform independently of one another just like any other raw material that is mined and apportioned with cold and calculated efficiency. If Reinhard Heydrich were alive today and a filmmaker, he would not proceed any differently.

Back from the Abyss

Having warned us against the potential ravages of modern technology, Heidegger concludes his essay on a surprisingly optimistic note. Quoting a few lines from the poet Hölderlin, he suggests that "the essence of technology must harbor in itself the growth of the saving power."[39] By this he means that, regardless of how dominant and overwhelming technology appears to be at first, it inevitably contains within itself seeds that could again make us confront the essential mystery of being in the world. With this in mind, I now suggest that the digital revolution in the movies also provides us with some effective antidotes. Three countermeasures appear to me to have the most potential in this regard: the emergence of a fresh shooting spirit as a result of the miniature cameras now on the market; the development of storytelling techniques that were not possible with film; and the creation of radically new visual treatments for the image.

First, let's examine how the pint-sized digital cameras available everywhere can contribute to producing a new kind of filmmaking.[40] I would like to recall "The Caméra-Stylo," Alexandre Astruc's celebrated manifesto, written some 50 years ago, in which he called for a cinema where "the filmmaker/author writes with his camera as a writer writes with his pen."[41] That line can be interpreted in two ways. On the one hand, there is an appeal for a new relationship between writing and image-making, one where direction would go beyond merely "illustrating or presenting a scene"—a proposal that was to a large extent answered by the New Wave directors.[42] On the other hand, the sentence also suggests the need for more discreet equipment: a smaller camera that could be held personally by the director. In the end, for both Astruc and the New Wave directors, the reality of production in their days—the heavy equipment, the bulky cameras, the large crews needed to make a film, etc.—was just too much to overcome. Quite reasonably, a caveat ended his piece:



Alexandre Astruc's book—dreaming of a caméra-stylo

the realization that "although we know what we want, we do not know whether, when, and how we will be able to do it."[43]

But we know the answers. Today it is finally possible to implement the creative arrangement he proposed back then—that of a writer carrying pen and paper in a café. Liberated from the weight of the gear and "the pressure of this $20,000-an-hour crew that's had their breakfast and is waiting just outside the door,"[44] the artist is now able to face the world in a novel way, thinking on the spot and "writing" with his or her camera. Jon Jost, to take a single example, thrives in this new environment because his tiny camera allows him to shoot his movies unnoticed insofar as people "think that you're shooting home movies or something. . . . I told the actors," he said, "we are just going to go into this café, and you're going to sit down here and there, and we'll shoot this thing . . . and could you go and ask them to turn the music down a little lower?"[45] Because there are no big cameras around, no celebrities to fuss about, no cops, no crew, no lights, no boom, no stunts, no obvious rehearsals, no "Action!" and no "Cut!," a different protocol emerges.[46] What is lost—careful compositions, harmonious lighting, exacting camera movements, etc.—is more than compensated for by the authenticity, restlessness, and unpredictability of a real-life situation.

Another redemptive move can be observed in Mike Figgis's ambitious digital project *Time Code* (2000). While long takes were always used to great effect, they were necessarily limited by the size of the magazine attached to the camera.[47] In this project, however, capitalizing on the time advantage made possible by digital video, Figgis shot four stories in simultaneous long takes of 93 minutes. Motivating the whole operation was Figgis's desire to bring back "the sustained power of a theater performance to film," a move that puts him in flat opposition to about everybody working professionally today.[48] Additionally, even though Figgis shot the entire event (the four concurrent stories) 15 times and coached actors and crew at screening sessions at the end of each day, the nonstop action in different locations severely limited his ability to influence the specifics of each take. "To discourage any attempt at cross-editing," he even encouraged "the actors to wear different clothes every day."[49] So, in contrast to Lucas, who wants to micromanage every detail under his command, Figgis put himself in a situation where he had to trust his actors and crew to do the best they could each time they went out. Sure, things went wrong at times, but happy accidents showed up as well. By letting the dice roll where they would, Figgis demonstrated in no uncertain terms that indeterminacy in a project can infuse it with surprising rewards. Far from being perceived as flaws, mishaps by actors and camera operators in fact heighten our involvement in the nonstop event.

Finally, the digital apparatus was made to subvert the conventional pictorial space that regulated painting for four centuries and has dominated film since its origin. One only has to look at Raúl Ruiz's *Time Regained* (1999) to have a taste of what could be achieved (with more ease) through the new medium. In his attempt to find a visual equivalent to Marcel Proust's elaborate writing style, Ruiz decided to place people and objects on moving platforms and propel them this way or that in the midst of a shot, radically changing the perspective of each scene in the process. To our eyes, the result is as marvelously fresh as Picasso's *Demoiselles d'Avignon* must have been to its

Caméra-stylo—today's versions

own audience in 1907. Beyond this, one could also make use of compositing while rejecting the conventional approach that seeks only to "reterritorialize" (to use Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's notion in *Anti-Oedipus*) the discrete components into a new image that looks just as organic and homogeneous as any ordinary picture. Here, instead, the individuated parts could be used to comment on one another in the same manner as different voices and styles of speech combine to create the power of James Joyce's *Ulysses*.[50] By celebrating its manifold potential, the new compound would thus openly challenge the monadic image. Although video artists have explored this kind of image-making almost from the beginning, they have for the most part handled it in a painterly fashion, not as a dramatist would. The daunting challenge will be to make this complex, constructivist, multi-imaged panorama around the characters work dramatically for the story.

In *The Phantom Menace*, the most extraordinary digital accomplishment leads to a shot that nobody notices in the theater. Indeed, it would have been much cheaper to film the expanded scene at the time of the shoot had Lucas known then what he truly wanted. For him, however, the point is moot: what matters is to move moviemaking away from the world to a digital back lot with all the controls this implies. If Lucas is successful, and the rest of the business follows, all the talk of a Renaissance in the art, the democratic opening of the medium to a new brand of filmmakers, the possibility of expanded, less restricted distribution channels, etc., will have been for naught—a historical situation Benjamin characterized as the "phantasmagoria" of progress."[51] Can this be true? Is the whole affair no more than a sideshow, an offshoot of Sony's corporate challenge to Eastman to become the number one company in the business? If that's the case, the present disruptions in the system will eventually ease up, and the same movies as before will once again be made—with large, high-definition electronic cameras maybe, but with the same talent and crew, the same high budget, and with "the monopolistic stranglehold . . . of the distribution marketplace" intact.[52]

Whoever wins in the end though, there's no escaping the fact that Lucas's proposal for the future remains at bottom thoroughly conventional, for in the product he envisions, the visual world is reconstructed along the same specifications as the old one, and so we end up with a nineteenth-century story dressed up in twenty-first century garb. Furthermore, Raúl Ruiz is probably right when he suggests that "technological overload leads nowhere."[53] To imagine the future of a vital and creative digital cinema, we better look elsewhere. Whether directors choose to write, shoot, and edit a movie entirely on their own, conceive of the

project as a throw of the dice, a Nietschean becoming where the result cannot be known in advance, or think of radicalizing the image of old, it is just possible that the medium finally has the chance to venture into avenues we never thought possible. To be able to do so after one hundred years of cinema should reassure us that, indeed, we ain't seen nothin' yet.

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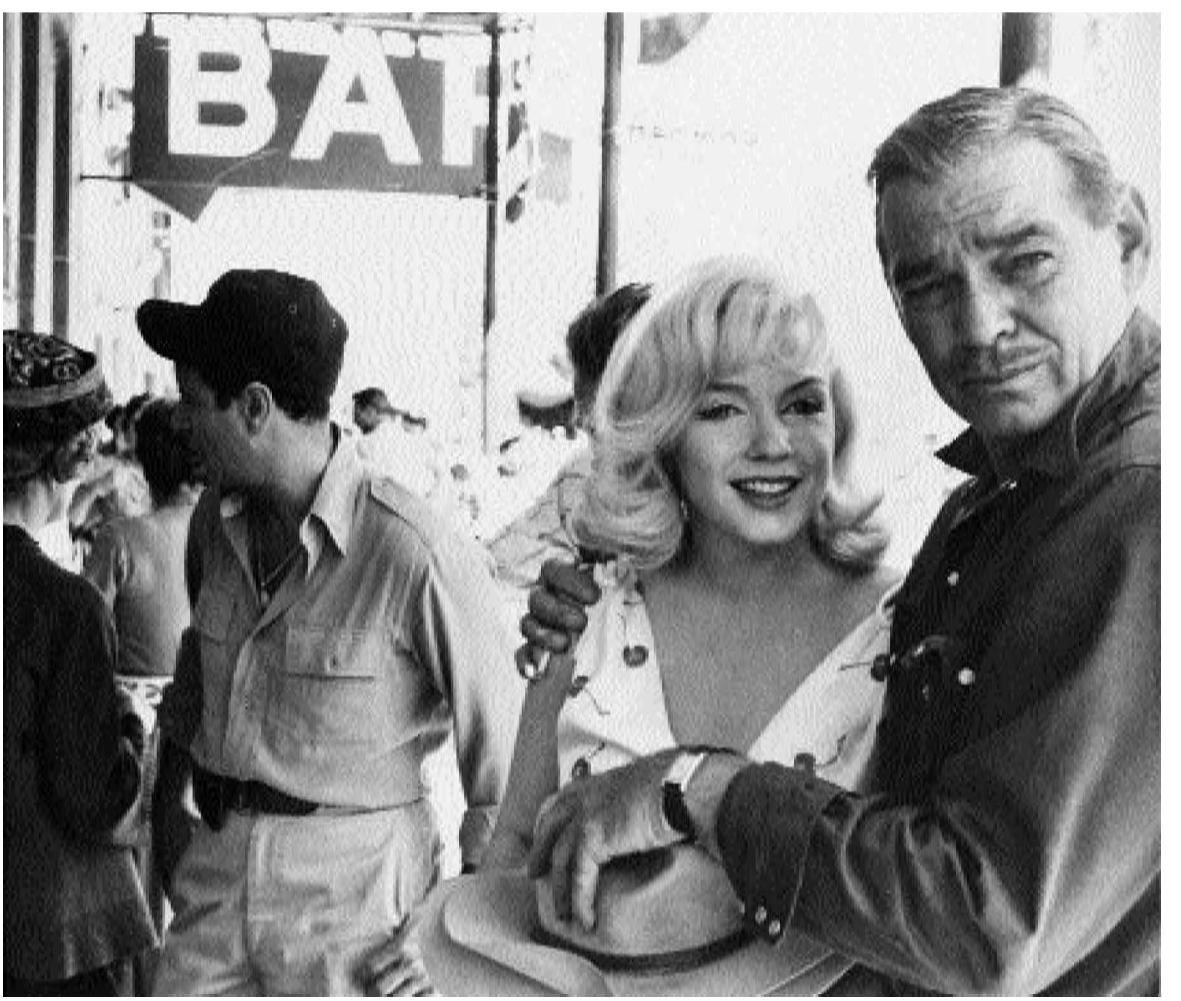
Notes

1. The Sony 24-frame digital camera with its Panavision lens has already been tested by different directors. Digital projection made its debut during the release of *The Phantom Menace*, while *Bounce* was "dropped" from orbiting satellites directly into some specially equipped theaters.
2. See past issues of *RES*, *Film & Video*, *Millimeter*, *DV*, *Videomaker*, etc.
3. For more on this, check "The Future of Filmmaking," in *American Cinematographer*, vol. 81, no. 9 (September 2000), pp. 73-90, and "Reflections on the Future" (a compilation of interviews with directors of photography by An Tran and Tommy Nguyen) at <www.cinematographyworld.com>.
4. Ron Magid, "Master of His Universe: George Lucas Discusses *The Phantom Menace* and the Impact of Digital Filmmaking on the Industry's Future," *American Cinematographer*, vol. 80, no. 9 (September 1999), pp. 32, 30.
5. The seminal book on this topic remains George P. Landow, *Hypertext: The Convergence of Contemporary Cultural Theory and Technology* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992). Closer to home, *Wide Angle* has devoted an entire issue to different aspects of the digital revolution in vol. 21, no. 1 (January 1999).
6. Martin Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell, trans. William Lovitt (San Francisco, CA: Harper, 1977), p. 294.
7. For more on this, see my essay "Visuality and Power: The Work of the Steadicam," *Film Quarterly*, vol. 47, no. 2 (Winter 1993-94), pp. 8-17.
8. Walter Murch, *In the Blink of an Eye: A Perspective on Film Editing* (Los Angeles: Silman James Press, 1995), pp. 75-76.
9. The dramatic incident was recorded in Michal Leszczylowski's film *Directed by Andrei Tarkovsky* (1988).
10. George Spiro Dibie from the International Cinematographers Guild has brought attention to a not so cryptic appeal by Sony to movie producers to economize by using video crews as opposed to film crews. George Spiro Dibie, "Shame on the *New York Times*" at <www.cameraguild.com/news/guild/shame_nyt.htm>.
11. My argument is based on observations gleaned in student and low-budget filmmaking. On more professional sets, the cost of the project may be enough to keep talent and crew in check.
12. Lev Manovich, "The Logic of Selection" (2000), an essay available at <http://rhizome.org>.
13. With this in mind, let us also recall Karl Mannheim's insight: "The new impulses, intuitions and fresh approaches to the world, if they have no time to mature in small groups, will be apprehended by the masses as mere stimuli." Karl Mannheim, *Man and Society in an Age of Reconstruction* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1941), p. 87.
14. Anne-Marie Willis, "Digitisation and the Living Death of Photography," in *Culture, Technology and Creativity in the Late Twentieth Century*, ed. Philip Hayward (London: John Libbey, 1990), p. 204.
15. A good analysis of the impact of the digital image on the notion of realism in the cinema can be found in Stephen Prince's essay "True Lies: Perceptual Realism, Digital Images, and Film Theory," *Film Quarterly*, vol. 49, no. 3 (Spring 1996), pp. 27-37.
16. Jean Baudrillard, *Simulations*, trans. Paul Foss, Paul Patton, and Philip Beitchman (New York: Semiotexte, 1983), p. 4.
17. Magid, "Master of His Universe," p. 27.
18. Quoted in Philip W. Jackson, *John Dewey and the Lessons of Art* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), p. 22.
19. Ibid., p. 3.
20. Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Film Theory and Criticism*, fourth edition, ed. Gerald Mast, Marshall Cohen, and Leo Braudy (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 672. In this essay, the lack of direct contact between actors and audience is used by Benjamin as an example of loss of aura made possible by the machinery of cinema.
21. For more on the tricks of the trade, check Uta Hagen's *Respect for Acting* (New York: Macmillan, 1973).
22. Quoted in Beaumont Newhall, *The History of Photography* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1982), p. 78.
23. Magid, "Master of His Universe," p. 32.
24. Scott McQuire, "Digital Dialectics: The Paradox of Cinema in a Studio Without Walls," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, vol. 19, no. 3, p. 18.
25. Ron Magid, "Edit-Suite Filmmaking," *American Cinematographer*, vol. 80, no. 9 (September 1999), p. 120.
26. David Tanaka, quoted in Ellen Wolff, "Directing in Post," *Millimeter* (June 1999), p. 32.
27. Ken McGorry, "Optical Illusions," *Post*, June 1999; the quotes are pp. 72, 70, and 72 respectively.
28. Lev Manovich, "Cinema as a Cultural Interface" (1997), p. 10; a paper available on his website: <http://www.manovich.net>.
29. In Ellen Wolff, "Directing in Post," p. 32.
30. Martin Heidegger, *The Question Regarding Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), p. 134.
31. Ibid., p. 129.
32. Ibid., p. 128.
33. Ibid., p. 135.
34. Ibid., p. 131.
35. David Michael Levin, "Psychopathology in the Epoch of Nihilism," in his *Pathologies of the Modern Self: Postmodern Studies on Narcissism, Schizophrenia, and Depression* (New York: New York University Press, 1987), p. 48.

36. Magid, "Master of His Universe," pp. 26-27, 30, 32-33, 35.
37. "George Lucas," narrated by Diane Sawyer, "Sixty Minutes," CBS/KNXT, Los Angeles, March 28, 1999.
38. Marcel Hénaff, "Sade, the Mechanization of the Libertine Body, and the Crisis of Reason," in *Technology and the Politics of Knowledge*, ed. Andrew Feenberg and Alastair Hannay (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995), pp. 232-33.
39. Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, p. 310.
40. Everybody in the business was shocked to learn that *The Celebration* (Thomas Vinterberg, 1999) had been shot with a camera that retailed for less than $2,500. Today many students have cameras more expensive than that.
41. Alexandre Astruc, "The Birth of a New Avant-Garde: La Caméra-Stylo," in *The New Wave*, ed. Peter Graham (New York: Doubleday, 1968), p. 22.
42. Ibid., p. 22.
43. Ibid.
44. Danny Boyle, quoted in Cynthia Wisehart, "Practical Virtues: Four Directors Discuss the Limits of Digital Production," *Millimeter* (November 1997), p. 34.
45. Kim Reed, "DV and the Independent Filmmaker: Jon Jost Leaves Film for Digital Video," *DV* (September 1999), p. 42.
46. This is of course Hollywood's worst nightmare. Judy Irola, ASC, for instance, noticed that on a digital movie she recently shot she used four crew members as opposed to the usual fifteen. "So eleven people were out of work," she wistfully concluded. In "Reflections on the Future," p. 2.
47. The work of Max Ophüls, Miklós Jancsó, and Theodoros Angelopoulos comes to mind.
48. "Mike Figgis: Working Without a Net," *Film & Video* (April 2000), p. 55.
49. Ellen Wolff, "Fade to Black: Mike Figgis, Director," *Millimeter* (January 2000), p. 126.
50. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), pp. 244-48.
51. For a clear explanation of Benjamin's notion of phantasmagoria, see Susan Buck-Morss, *Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991).
52. Mike Figgis, quoted in "Mike Figgis: Working Without a Net," p. 59.
53. Quoted in Stéphane Bouquet and Emmanuel Burdeau, "Dans le laboratoire de *La Recherche*: Entretien avec Raoul Ruiz," *Cahiers du Cinéma*, no. 535 (May 1999), p. 52 (my trans.).

George Kouvaros

The Misfits
What Happened



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> No matter whether the story is plausible, no matter the camera or the mike, or the director, or whether a film was born or not, more important is what happened around the camera.
>
> Jean Rouch, *La Pyramide humaine* (1961)

Around the Camera

Scattered across various articles, magazines, and biographies, the photographs taken on the set of John Huston's 1961 adaptation of Arthur Miller's *The Misfits* came to define both the careers of a number of those involved in its production and a special moment of folly within the period known as Late Hollywood. Published together with an essay by Serge Toubiana and an interview with Arthur Miller (who also wrote the screenplay), the photographs gathered in *The Misfits: Story of a Shoot* (London: Phaidon Press, 2000) provide an invaluable insight into the history of this ill-fated production. Toubiana reminds us that it was not the first time Magnum photographers had covered a shoot—indeed, by the mid 1950s, Hollywood was an important part of Magnum's activities and income—but it was the first time they had exclusive rights over the production of images.

Magnum and the producers agreed that teams of two photographers changing every 15 days would cover the film, most of which was shot on location in Nevada, away from the studios. This method was employed for the duration of a shoot that was to take 90 days, thus allowing the photographers the time necessary to establish a relationship to their subjects. By working in this way, a range of different photographers ended up with access: Inge Morath, Henri Cartier-Bresson, Dennis Stock, Eve Arnold, Ernst Haas, Cornell Capa, Bruce Davidson, Elliott Erwitt, and Erich Hartmann. The location shooting, the latitude given to the teams, and the time it took for the shoot to be completed created a unique atmosphere and freedom for the photographers. This sense of freedom is clearly evident in the intimacy and candor of the images, images in which the idleness, anxiety, and terror that mark the space of a shoot are clearly apparent.

The central object of fascination was Marilyn Monroe. It was her involvement that ensured the photographs would be snapped up by the international press. The star was 34 at the time. Not only was her marriage to Arthur Miller in a state of dissolution, but she herself was, by all reports, close to physical and emotional exhaustion, arriving on the *Misfits* set just after finishing work on *Let's Make Love* (1960). Toubiana details the delays and scheduling chaos caused by Marilyn's ill health. He does this not to add to the mythology of a female star spinning out of control, but to account for the specific conditions governing the shoot, conditions in which uncertainty, delay, and fatigue became dominant factors. If ever there was a film where "what happened around the camera" came not simply to dominate but more mysteriously to work its way into the very texture of the thing itself, then *The Misfits* was that film.

For Toubiana and some of the photographers he quotes, it was this state of crisis that made possible the freedom they enjoyed on the set. Elliott Erwitt put it bluntly: "The job was very enjoyable because the whole set-up was so disorganized. Marilyn was in a very disturbed frame of mind and Huston spent all night playing cards, smoking and drinking. It was total chaos."[1]

The photographers, Toubiana proposes, "were part of the film's 'family,' even if this family was in the process of falling apart before their eyes." He concludes: "They took part in the work of filming like people whose job it was to trace the 'footprints' of an individual and collective adventure in which each person's role evolved and was gradually transformed by the hazards of the weather or by personal problems" (87).

Toubiana's description and the testimonies of the photographers provide an evocative context for reading these images and the intimations of heartbreak and crisis long associated with this production. But there is something else apparent in these images, something that relates to changes in the image of stardom and the institutional frameworks governing its production. The images of Marilyn—and to a lesser extent those of Clift and Gable—produced by the Magnum photographers differ markedly from the statuesque glamour photographs of earlier Hollywood stars, images characterized by what Gertrud Koch describes as "an abstracting reduction to the type despite the evocation of concrete fullness."[2] In the majority of studio photographs from the 1920s and 30s, the actor is enclosed within a fixed set of attributes consistent with a particular type of star persona created by the studio. This applies to images of the star taken on the set of individual films and images of the star at home. As Richard Dyer reminds us, star image is "made up of screen roles and obviously stage-managed public appearances, and also of images of the manufacture of that 'image' and of the real person who is the site or occasion of it."[3] But within the highly regulated system of classical Hollywood stardom, this revelation of the private worked to effect what Paul McDonald terms a "mutual reinforcement of the professional and private identities of performers, constructing the star as a coherent and noncontradictory image."[4]

Even as late as the 1950s, the concern with carefully integrating screen image and public persona dictated the types of star images produced. At stake in these images was not only the individual star's career identity but also the public profile of the industry itself. As Richard Schickel argues, Sid Avery's photographic images of stars at home and on the set "represented Hollywood as it wanted to see itself and to be seen by outsiders at this troubled time in its history: securely functioning and apparently conducting its business as usual."[5] Schickel goes as far as to identify a double aspect to these images: Avery's work both "satisfied the bland expectations of its subjects and clients and yet survives to engage our own more knowing (perhaps more cynical, certainly more ironic) eye" (11). And maybe this is indeed the case. In the images of Rock Hudson, Humphrey Bogart, Paul Newman, and others, there is a sense of performers acting out a highly polished mid 50s version of normalcy: Hudson hosting a barbecue for friends; Bogart and family enjoying a quiet evening at home; Newman preparing French toast for Joanne Woodward in the kitchen of their Beverly Hills home. In Avery's photographs, domestic life and Hollywood life are carefully brought together in a cohabitation that is at once ironic and straight-faced.

The images collected by Toubiana and Miller are less firmly wedded to industry requirements and hence, not surprisingly, they reveal something different, something that, at first glance, appears even more mundane than Avery's simulations of domesticity: an actor at work privately preparing for a scene or else in discussion with the director or another member of the cast. Across these images we see bodies marked by fatigue, under pressure, or simply worn out by a process that is fundamentally alienating. Eve Arnold's photographs of Marilyn, in particular, capture the exhaustion and emotional toll of the shoot. In one image, Marilyn lies face down on a cot with her head turned toward the camera. Located directly behind Marilyn, Paula Strasberg seems to be keeping guard over her famous pupil as she rests between takes. The detail that catches our attention, however, is a hand protruding from the bottom right-hand corner massaging Marilyn's feet. The surreptitious way this hand protrudes into the frame suggests something that shouldn't be there or be seen: not the hand itself but the complete exhaustion and fatigue of the performer's body caught in medias res. The actress is caught both in the middle of life and in the middle of two kinds of scrutiny: that of the film in production and the less obtrusive yet equally insistent observation of the still photographer.

Here, as elsewhere in the book, the emphasis is on the downtime of cinematic acting: those moments of interruption or interval just before or just after a scene, moments when the body is caught in a kind of temporal lag, either still encumbered by a gesture or desperately trying to find the gesture required. What is it, we wonder, that these actors are looking for in the middle of this harsh landscape? What kinds of emotions are being concocted across these faces and bodies pushed to the limit? The glamour and ease once associated with playing to the camera have been transformed into something harder, something more tentative and fundamentally uncertain. "Famous faces yet not themselves" is how Joyce Carol Oates describes the disquiet surrounding the actors in *The Misfits*.[6]

II The most common way we tend to consider star image in crisis involves the by now all too familiar disclosures of infidelities or sexual aberrance that claim to shed light on the star's true self. As Richard deCordova aptly put it: "The sexual scandal is the primal scene of all star discourse, the only scenario that offers the promise of a full and satisfying disclosure of the star's identity."[7] Rather than opening up a crisis within the construction of star image, these scandals in fact secure our understanding of the star along a familiar pattern of knowledge in which sexual disclosures serve as privileged moments of truth. The subtler disturbance generated by the Magnum photographs has nothing to do with such disclosures. It is directly linked to the display of heavy fatigue and the quotidian residues of moments when nothing seems to be happening. In these photographs, Monroe, Clift, and Gable emerge as avatars of our own dealings with a time that is constantly interrupted, a time that moves in fits and starts. It is this consciousness of time that places these images at a remove from the standard portrayal of Hollywood glamour. Their special appeal, we might venture, is based on their recalibration of the image of stardom according to logic more akin to both its industrial nature and the conditions that define everyday experience.

Viewed in this light, the images produced by the Magnum photographers require a slightly different reading to the one proposed by Toubiana: not as the product of a one-off gamble or unique set of circumstances, but as an outcome of certain tendencies within the highly mediated relationship between actor, image, and audience. Across these photographs, the figure of the star comes together not all at once but in a manner that resembles the awkward movements and progressions of a flicker book. It remains to be decided whether these oblique revelations concerning the fate of the actor could only have come about during a time of significant transformation within the industry. Interestingly, Toubiana notes that during the shoot it was the actors who had contractual rights over the choice of photographs to be used for advertising (68). The sense of intimacy that was a hallmark of Magnum's work since its founding by Robert Capa, George Rodger, and Henri Cartier-Bresson in 1947 was certainly attractive to stars, particularly at a time when the withdrawal of the studios from rolling production and the abandonment of the contract system of employment meant that it was in the actor's interest not to become so firmly fixed as a particular type.

In his survey of Magnum's work in cinema, Alain Bergala argues that the very changes that created the opportunity for Magnum's particular approach to photography would soon also lead to an erosion of its relationship to filmmaking. The rise of the agent resulted in even greater control over the manufacture and distribution of images of stardom. The impact of television would also drastically curtail the market for on-set photography. "It was not long," writes Bergala, "before publicity photographs and the big magazines which bought them also went into decline" (12). In the 70s this decline gathered speed.

> On-shoot photographs were rapidly becoming standardized to meet the already greatly reduced demand of the magazines—a few portrait shots of actors, or of the director if he was a celebrity, a few pictures of a prestigious set or the equipment. Shots had to be taken so quickly that there was no longer any time for the photographer to have any real contact with the crew, still less to absorb and understand the individual atmosphere of the shoot (13).

In contrast to the scenario described by Bergala, the shoot of *The Misfits* was clearly marked by an overabundance of time. And it is here that we can locate the element separating this production from a number of others covered by Magnum. The photographers were dealing with a shoot marked by more delays, downtime, and waiting than usual, with time that passed but went nowhere, a time at once non-productive yet also able to facilitate a certain troubled revelation. Given the cast and the script, perhaps it could not have been otherwise. In its treatment of American archetypes and aspirations, *The Misfits* serves as a companion piece to Nick Ray's *The Lusty Men* (1952). "In any case," Ray famously remarked about *The Lusty Men*, "this film isn't a Western. It's really a film about people who want nothing more than their own home."[8] The same thing could be said of *The Misfits*. But what is different in *The Misfits*—what makes it at first glance a much harsher film—is that this dream has all but fizzled out. Like the battered car originally received as a "divorce present" from Roslyn's husband (Kevin McCarthy) and which she refuses to drive because of the unwanted attention of male drivers, home and family life are the wreckage out of which the characters seek to emerge.

Miller describes the inspiration for the original short story as Nevada's population of divorcees and outcasts: "The whole state was full of misfits, people who did not fit anywhere. They knew it, they made fun of it, of their inability to function in the United States." Roslyn's presence transforms Guido's (Eli Wallach) half-completed ranch house into something resembling

© Eve Arnold/Magnum Photos

a home—not for Guido, however, but for Roslyn and Gay Langland, the aging cowboy played by Clark Gable. When these two set up house, the physical surroundings start to take shape, gardens are planted, furniture rearranged. But it is a most fragile configuration haunted by an awareness that what is occurring is something that no longer comes naturally but must be performed and carefully rehearsed in order to be mastered. Perhaps this is why one of the most affecting photographs in the collection is of Roslyn (Marilyn) caught—by Dennis Stock—with one foot in the air, head tossed back in amusement, balancing on the makeshift front steps to the house. At this moment she is captured in mid-flight, performing the ceremonial act of both moving toward and leaving the half-finished dream home of a former couple: "I can go in and I can come out. I go in and I can come out. I go in and I can come out. " Time and again, she repeats this simple yet highly charged incantation as if she is trying to convince herself that it can be done. Each move up and down the step becomes part of an attempt to rid herself or the house of some terrible spell that keeps what once may have been simple domesticity beyond reach.

Stock's image reminds us of something Jean-Louis Comolli sought to stress quite a few years ago, something that takes us back to that complex relation between image, actor, and spectator. Comolli writes that cinematic performance "requires the participation of the spectators not as consumers but as players, accomplices, masters of the game, even, if they are also its stakes."[9] This game, however, is always mobile and constantly shifting: "It is him and it is not, always and at the same time; we believe in it and we do not, at the same time. Neither of the terms ever really prevails over the other, each keeps the other as a ground against which it stands out" (48). It is her and it is not, we might say of Arnold's photograph of Marilyn looking up from the pages of her script, hands covering her mouth and nose, looking not directly at the camera but just to the side; or else we might say the same thing of the image taken by Bruce Davidson of Marilyn leaning out of the side window of a car. Her eyes are closed as an assistant prepares to adjust her makeup with a cotton ball that hovers just off the surface of her skin. In the background, half-covered by the car, a group of onlookers stares back at the camera. Comolli describes the interplay of actor and role as an "improbable conjunction of two identities, two bodies which exclude one another while coinciding" (47).

The interesting thing is that Comolli's remarks describe a relationship not simply to an actor but more specifically to an image of an actor or, further still, to a photographic image of an actor. The ambivalent conjunction of two bodies has as its accomplice the specific nature of photographic apprehension: its unique capacity to declare the existence of the thing it represents, yet to give us this existence in the form of an image, a two-dimensional representation of something absent. Following on from Comolli's remarks, the photograph, we might say, excuses the actor from a game in which he or she is nonetheless a central stake. And by absenting the actor in this way, the photograph can be transported across time and space, reminding us of something left behind yet also able to stage or perform its own particular meanings and emotions.

III

In *The Misfits: Story of a Shoot*, the particular emotions and meanings performed by the images are bound up with the sense of imminent mortality that hangs over the careers and lives depicted. For Monroe, *The Misfits* was to be her last completed film. A day after shooting ended, Gable suffered a heart at-

tack; less than two weeks later, he was dead. Ironically, it was Clift—from the director's viewpoint, the most unstable of the three—who ended up surviving the longest. The photographs collected by Toubiana and Miller reinforce the elegiac quality of the film—in terms of both its story and the lives and careers documented by the film. But they also do something else which breaks the constricted circuit of melancholy often associated with photographs of dead actors. This something else is linked to their ability to open up and reconfigure the affective range of the cinematic image—to suggest a space to the side of the narrative, a space belonging neither to the actor nor to the role, and to let us see something whose very nature is defined by our willingness to question its existence.

Toward the end of Roland Barthes' *Camera Lucida* there is an interesting echo of this issue when he speculates on the transformations in our experience of the private. Barthes proposes that "the age of Photography corresponds precisely to the explosion of the private into the public, or rather into the creation of a new social value, which is the publicity of the private."[10] A few pages later, however, he will identify in certain photos the possibility of another experience of the image. This other experience does not involve the attribution of an imaginary resemblance between image and subject, but rather the identification of what he terms as the "air":

> The air . . . is a kind of intractable supplement of identity, what is given as an act of grace, stripped of any "importance": the air expresses the subject, insofar as that subject assigns itself no importance. In this veracious photograph, the being I love, whom I have loved, is not separated from itself: at last it coincides. And mysteriously this coincidence is a kind of metamorphosis (109).

For Barthes, the photographic image represents the place of crisis, a crisis brought about by the explosion of the private into the realm of publicity. Yet it also serves as the means by which it is possible to see something other than a catastrophic loss of the private. This something other that Barthes identifies is a sense of being that belongs neither to the person nor to their image. Rather it seems to hover in the spectral outline opened up and made possible by the image. Like Barthes' remarks on the air, the images from *The Misfits* open up the possibility of a different relation to the image. "There she is!," we might, following Barthes, exclaim, not believing that the image is somehow equivalent to the person but simply marking the point at which the photograph "launched desire beyond what it permits us to see" (59).

This sense of a beyond is not separate from the image but hovers just out of frame. It marks a space in which actor and character cannot be easily separated, but neither have they completely fused. Instead, these two figures engage in a perpetual ghosting or haunting of each other. "Do I add to the images in movies?" Barthes asks. "I don't think so; I don't have time: in front of the screen, I am not free to shut my eyes; otherwise, opening them again, I would not discover the same image; I am constrained to a continuous voracity; a host of other qualities, but not *pensiveness*" (55). These beguiling photographs retelling the story of a shoot that began with such high expectations yet quickly went off the rails are, in the final analysis, also part of a larger story still in the process of being told: a story about the kinds of relationships and forms of engagement that surround and constitute the experience of cinema. They open the experience of cinema to a series of oblique revelations and insights that are right there in front of our eyes, yet always just out of sight.

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Notes

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Mark Holcomb

To Kill a Mockingbird

The movie myth about the wise lawyer who defends an innocent man knowing he'll lose the case because of the color of his client's skin . . .

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A Classic Revisited

By now, the iconic status of Robert Mulligan's *To Kill a Mockingbird* is as entrenched in popular culture as its story line is ingrained in the popular imagination. A few fans may compare it unfavorably with Harper Lee's more sharply observed 1960 Pulitzer Prize-winning source novel, but for most people the film is the more resonant work—inaugurating the movie myth about the wise lawyer who defends an innocent man knowing he'll lose the case because of the color of his client's skin. According to Gregory Peck, the star of *Mockingbird*, F. Lee Bailey once confided to him that he became a lawyer "because of Atticus Finch,"[1] and Peck himself went on to say of the role, "It was like climbing into a favorite suit of clothes. . . . I knew all about that man, those children and that small-town background." Another high-profile fan, director and screenwriter Cameron Crowe, became a virtual one-man cheering section for *Mockingbird* during the publicity blitz for *Almost Famous*; in addition to mentioning it in seemingly every interview he gave, he created opening titles for *Almost Famous* that pay homage to the celebrated title sequence in Mulligan's 1962 film, while its central, adolescent character is at one point urged to grow up to be "like Atticus Finch." Crowe also placed *Mockingbird* at number five on his list of "a dozen movie musts" and called it his "first favorite film."[2] In another movie list, the American Film Institute ranked *Mockingbird* 34th in its roster of the "100 best American films of all time" in 1998.

Worlds beyond the movie industry have also taken the film to heart: some law schools have structured whole ethics courses around the fictional Atticus, and Notre Dame Law School's Thomas Shaffer even wrote a 1981 law review article entitled "The Moral Theology of Atticus Finch." In a 1998 television interview on ABC's "20/20," independent counsel Kenneth Starr told Diane Sawyer, "I love the model of Atticus Finch of doing what he thought was right when everybody was saying, 'Why are you doing this? This is a terrible thing.' There is truth, and the truth demands respect."[3] (This was at the height of the Clinton-Lewinsky imbroglio, so Starr was either conveniently overlooking the outcome of *Mockingbird*'s case or flagrantly hedging his bets.) Perhaps writer Albert Murray—who, ironically enough, was honored as Alabama's most distinguished writer with the first-ever Harper Lee Award in 1998—put commentary on the film into its proper perspective when he graciously, ambiguously, referred to *Mockingbird* as a "Sunday school lesson."[4]

It has of course become more than that, and yet—accolades and misty-eyed, well-meaning hyperbole aside—*To Kill a Mockingbird* is actually not, in purely technical terms, a cinematic masterpiece. Robert Mulligan is best remembered for an indistinct directorial style: most of his films seem somehow beyond his control, as if they could careen off course at any moment (*Inside Daisy Clover*, 1966) or coast to a halt from sheer apathy (1969's lugubrious *The Stalking Moon*). Screenwriter Horton Foote's sensitive adaptation of Lee's novel, composer Elmer Bernstein's delicately mournful score, and Peck's totemic central performance are, in large part, what make *Mockingbird* an exception among Mulligan's films.

The director's metier was mood, which *Mockingbird* has to spare. The bittersweet ambience of the Finch household and mysterious, Gothic milieu of fictional Maycomb, Alabama (especially in the nighttime sequences, which are shot in the style of Universal's horror programmers of the 1930s and 40s) are the stuff of childhood fancy, and Mulligan captures them with aplomb. (In this regard, the film diverges from Lee's novel, which unfolds with a distanced, mildly sardonic tone.) Little wonder that *Mockingbird* has such a strong hold on those of us who first saw it as children.

But aesthetic excellence, or the lack of it, isn't what gives movie myths their power, any more than fond recollections make a movie mythic. *To Kill a Mockingbird*'s hypercinematic charge derives instead from a

Mockingbird . . . adopts a rigid, neatly implied internal hierarchy of race, class, and character.

convergence of powerful feelings of nostalgia and the movie's standing as what Peck called, in a 1997 documentary on its making, a "social problem" film. His dated terminology is revealing, for *Mockingbird* relies on a late-1950s liberal conception of race and class as its sociopolitical touchstone. Fair enough—the movie is 40 years old. But like a child forced to grow up too soon (or not allowed to grow up at all), it has since been pressed into service as a complacent, fanciful, bourgeois creed uninformed by the Civil Rights movement, scarcely altered by subsequent history, and wholeheartedly sanctioned by the mainstream media. As outmoded as its underlying principles are, they're upheld every time *To Kill a Mockingbird* is extolled as anything more than an entertaining and evocative populist relic. But in fact the film obscures the very questions of class and race that underlie its mythic reputation, relying on a portrait of America as a place in which racism and hatred are incidental to social and political inequality. As film scholar Linda Williams has noted, *Mockingbird* "neither radically changed national feeling about race nor innovated new forms of media."[5]

To be fair, *Mockingbird* encourages its skewed reputation by adopting a rigid, neatly implied internal hierarchy of race, class, and character, and a near-acrobatic ability to subvert those distinctions whenever convenient. The social structure of rural Maycomb is made plain almost from the film's opening scene, in which one of Atticus's clients, a white farmer named Walter Cunningham, delivers food to the Finch household as a payment against his "entailment." Cunningham is duly deferential to middle-class Atticus, and his hard-working decency is underscored by an awkward yet proud demeanor and neat, if frayed, appearance. Cunningham's homespun virtue is undermined only when he turns up with a mob intent on lynching the jailed black field hand Tom Robinson (who's guarded by Atticus), but is immediately redeemed once he convinces the other men to abandon the enterprise when Atticus's young daughter Scout recognizes him in the

crowd. The incident goes unmentioned for the remainder of the film, but in Lee's novel it gives Atticus the opportunity to trot out *Mockingbird*'s pet metaphor. "You children last night made Walter Cunningham stand in my shoes for a minute,"[6] he tells son Jem and Scout, temporarily disregarding the rather more vulnerable position of the man standing in Tom's.

Poor working-class whites like Cunningham comprise the visible majority of Maycomb, as Lee reveals in her description of Tom Robinson's jury: "Sunburned, lanky, they seemed to be all farmers. . . . One or two of the jury looked vaguely like dressed-up Cunninghams" (166-67). On the next level up are working townspeople such as Sheriff Tate and professionals like Atticus and Judge Taylor. Above them, evidently, are only the benevolent government of FDR, alluded to in an ironic bit of opening narration taken directly from Lee's novel ("It was a time of vague optimism for some of the people: Maycomb County had recently been told it had nothing to fear but fear itself" [10]), and God. Somewhere in the mix, one presumes, are Maycomb's blacks, but they remain a largely nebulous presence.

Maycomb's black community may be as invisible as its ruling elite, but its lowest-of-the-lower classes—the Ewells—are distinctly palpable. Lee describes the family and their habitat in nearly subhuman terms:

> No economic fluctuations changed their status—people like the Ewells lived as guests of the county in prosperity as well as in the depths of a depression. No truant officers could keep their numerous offspring in school; no public health officer could free them from congenital defects, various worms, and the diseases indigenous to filthy surroundings. . . . [T]he Ewells gave the dump a thorough gleaning every day, and the fruits of their industry (those that were not eaten) made the plot of land around [their] cabin look like the playhouse of an insane child. (172-73)

Lee's metaphor is taken to absurd lengths in the film, in which the repugnantly racist Bob Ewell and his daughter Mayella, Tom's purported rape victim, pitch their performances somewhere between pantomime and barely contained hysteria. The Ewells are thoroughly despicable creatures for whom we need feel no compassion, to the point that by the film's end there is a sense that the family has gotten precisely what it deserves. This may be understandable in the case of the predatory Bob, but one can't help wondering about Mayella and the seven other Ewell children mentioned repeatedly during the trial. Fatherless and with no means of support, what's to become of them? The movie never says.

It doesn't say much about race, either, although that's ostensibly the crux of its argument. There are essentially two speaking roles for African-American actors in *To Kill a Mockingbird*—Tom, and the Finches' servant, Calpurnia. As individuals they are solidly and humanely portrayed (Calpurnia disciplines the recalcitrant Scout with real authority), but neither provides the film with any sense of a unified black presence. We do see Tom's cabin and his wife Helen on the two occasions that Atticus visits on business, and while there are friends and family members gathered outside, we never hear their dialogue or glimpse an establishing shot of the surrounding neighborhood as a whole. And Calpurnia, who brings order to the Finch household, appears to exist in a complete vacuum: no husband or family are mentioned, and when Atticus demands that she stay overnight while he protects Tom from the lynch mob, she complies without hesitation. It's somewhat surprising to learn that she has a home to go to at all.

Graciously depicted though they may be, Tom and Cal fit snugly into familiar and distinct types in a genre that Linda Williams has dubbed the "melodrama of black and white." Tom is both the virtuous, suffering Uncle Tom-like black victim (something Harper Lee must surely have been aware of when she named her

The courtroom drama . . . making us act as the film's jury in place of the trial's jury.

character) and the implicit, hypersexualized threat to white women, while Calpurnia is a nurturing, attentive mammy whose presence theoretically allows the Finches to "more fully exercise the privileges and authority granted by white skin."[7] *To Kill a Mockingbird* may function in part as a critique of the Southern desire for plantation-era "old days" and the "Tom/anti-Tom" dialectic Williams elucidates, but the presentation of its focal black characters fails to convincingly challenge the stereotypes that spawned them. Ultimately, Tom and Cal are as one-dimensionally good as the Ewells are broadly evil.

It's arguable that, for the purposes of the movie's narrative, black life in Maycomb is more than adequately represented by Tom, Calpurnia, and the spectators in the courthouse gallery. But if the blatantly fabricated charge against Tom and his disastrous trial are meant to be emblematic of a society that fails to protect blacks against such specious accusations—and worse, the cruel and unusual punishment (legally sanctioned or not) that follows—the lack of a viable black community or distinguishable black individuals in the film's Maycomb diminishes the scope of Tom's predicament. Moreover, the grotesque flamboyance of the Ewells gives the impression that ugly acts of racism are perpetrated only by the most degraded members of white society—Lee's "insane children," whose genesis, incidentally, goes unexplained.

To Kill a Mockingbird obscures the complexity of its subject matter not only with low-key warmth, comfortable stereotypes, and ossified good intentions, but also through an implicit desire for race and class to simply not matter. Or to matter, perhaps, only as indicators of personal aberration and failure—the failure of single individuals to "stand in the shoes" of others and deny them the right to sing innocuous mockingbird songs. The film's questions of systemic corruption and of our own complicity in or indifference to such systems fit into its conception of what a social problem is only insofar as we're led to identify

with its white characters. All well and good, except that it's a foregone conclusion which ones we're likely to identify with.

Explicit in the film's view of race and class relations is the notion that social problems are best "solved" through the actions of official bodies, in this case the American judicial system. A good deal of *To Kill a Mockingbird*'s second half is taken up by Tom's trial, which would appear to move the film squarely into the genre of courtroom drama, where it resides as legitimately as it does in the genre of black-and-white melodrama. Yet, as Carol J. Clover remarks, trial films "[position] us not as passive spectators, but as active ones, viewers with a job to do."[8] In one of its cleverer strokes, *Mockingbird* meets this criterion by making us act as the film's jury in place of the trial's jury, whom we see in only a handful of long and medium shots. Unfortunately, the predetermined outcome makes us as moot and inert as they are, and whatever outrage we may rightly feel is thus thwarted along with Tom's chance of a fair trial. Only Jem is moved to anger by the judicial travesty, but by then the film is too far along for him to assume the role of galvanizing key figure.

Jem's nascent activism is, in any event, subordinate to Boo Radley's climactic act of rescue, which provides the trial with its effective culmination. According to Kathy Laster, "Courtroom films of all persuasions mostly manage to re-establish the legitimacy of the prevailing system or at least belief in the rule of law."[9] To its credit, *Mockingbird* is an equivocal exception to this rule. Boo may be the least socially and politically powerful white male in Maycomb, but he is white and male nonetheless, and as such is an agent of the prevailing system. Yet the fact remains that he is firmly outside that system, and Sheriff Tate and Atticus's ultimate reliance on his act of rough justice proves how impotent they and the system have become.

In his "Overture" to *The Raw and the Cooked*, Claude Lévi-Strauss asserts that "myths operate in men's minds without their being aware of the fact . . . as if the thinking process were taking place in the myths."[10] He was referring to the mythological systems of traditional, so-called primitive societies, but he could just as easily have been describing the way movies operate—or "think"—in ours. On a more pragmatic level, movies do little more than reinforce private mythologies or reflect the fragmentation of modern life. Even so, a few films, deserving or otherwise, live up to the phenomenon Lévi-Strauss describes. It *is* possible to enjoy and even champion *To Kill a Mockingbird* without turning a blind eye to its thematic flaws or overestimating its relevance. It daringly rejects the bland conformity of the not-so-recently-past (at the time of the film's original release) Eisenhower era by casting Atticus's futile challenge to the status quo in a heroic light. At the very least, it tells its story in the context of race and class, which precious few films have attempted to do even in the intervening four decades. Perhaps that's only a modest accomplishment for a film of such widely perceived importance, scaled more to preadolescent personal inspiration than all-encompassing cultural myth. I first saw *To Kill a Mockingbird* when I was five years old; the film was three. It kindled my love of "serious" movies and my sense of social justice as well. In some measure, the film's unique mixture of amiable sentimentality, atavistic dread, and warmed-over New Deal liberalism is responsible for who I am today. I have no doubt that I'm in good company. But if *To Kill a Mockingbird*'s true lasting strength is its ability to appeal to and inspire children to thoughts of equality and justice, it's probably best to remember that children, unlike myths, grow up to find themselves in a world decidedly more complicated than the one in Robert Mulligan's film.

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3. The interview aired on Wednesday, November 25, 1998.
4. Quoted in Roy Hoffman, "Long Lives the Mockingbird," *New York Times* (August 9, 1998). sec. 7, p. 31.
5. Linda Williams, *Playing the Race Card: Melodramas of Black and White from Uncle Tom to O.J. Simpson* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001), p. 301.
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7. Williams, *Playing the Race Card*, p. 203.
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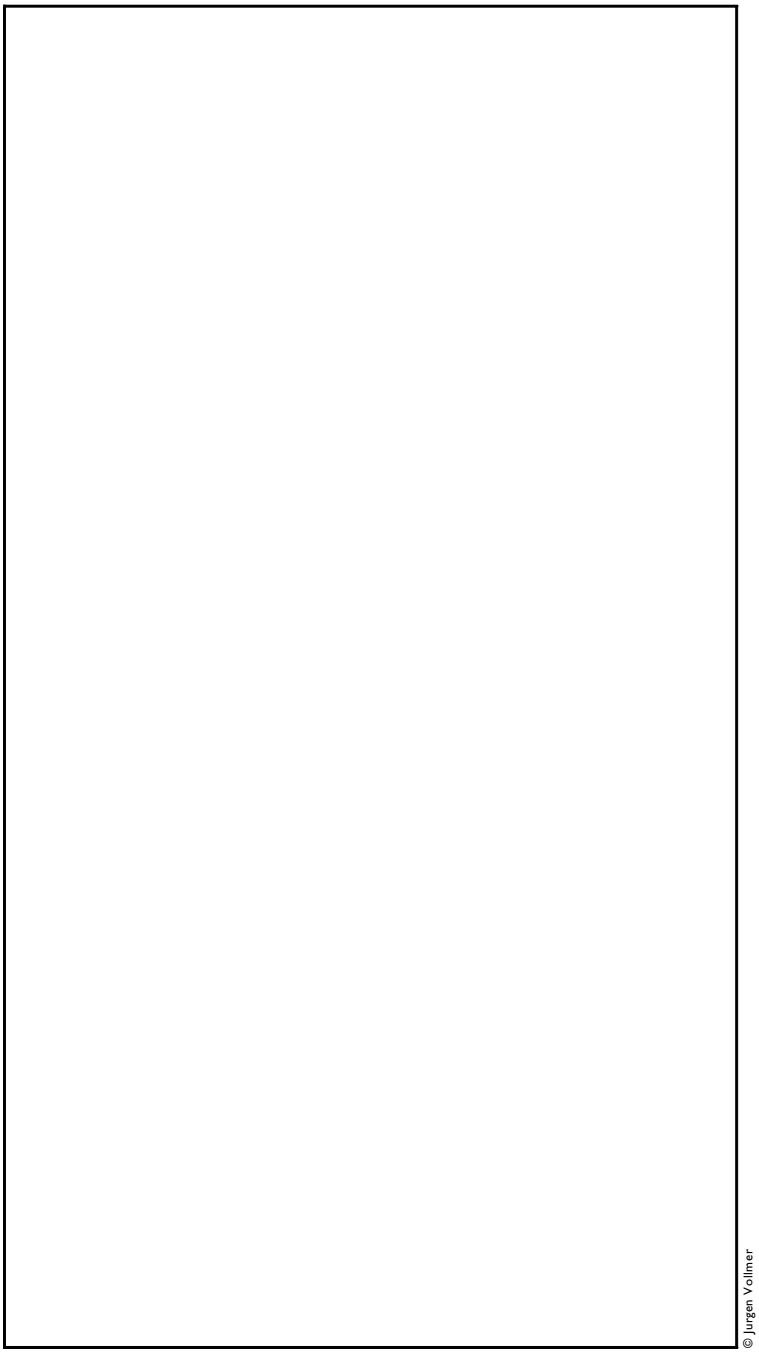
Reviews

From Hell

Directors: Allen and Albert Hughes. Producers: Don Murphy, Jane Hamsher. Writers: Terry Hayes, Rafael Yglesias. Cinematographer: Peter Deming. Twentieth Century-Fox.

Allen and Albert Hughes have made a name for themselves as being among the more thoughtful examiners of the social and economic conditions affecting urban African Americans working in cinema today. Their first three features—*Menace II Society* (1993), *Dead Presidents* (1995), and *American Pimp* (1999)—offer critiques of economic disenfranchisement, the drug trade, and black masculinity that refuse pat solutions to the complex problems African Americans face. Their latest film, *From Hell* (2001), marks the Hughes brothers' attempt to explore the same subject matter as their previous films but in a new urban setting and time period. Based on the Alan Moore/Eddie Campbell serial of the same name, the film recounts the Jack the Ripper murders of 1888. The brothers stated that this move out of Watts and into Victorian London represented a movement beyond their previous "black movies." Indeed, they have actually described *From Hell* as a "white movie," largely because of its white cast and setting. Yet this preoccupation with making a "white" film seems to have distracted the Hugheses from their subject matter. While their previous films focused less on actual crimes than on the sociological reasons for urban youth violence, here the Hughes brothers have turned an extremely complex work into a conventional whodunit in which a beleaguered police inspector works against time and a Masonic conspiracy to stop Jack the Ripper and save the winsome Irish prostitute he loves. The brothers' shift away from smart social criticism to commonplace crime melodrama demonstrates a troubled and inconsistent attitude toward the issue of race and its role in the filmmakers' oeuvre.



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Inspector Abberline (Johnny Depp, left) and Sgt. Godley (Robbie Coltrane) with another victim

Both the original serial (collected into a graphic novel in 1999) and the film place the murderer within Queen Victoria's court: a Masonic agent working to silence a controversy that could potentially embarrass the royal family. In Alan Moore's narrative, however, the identity of the murderer is almost beside the point; Moore reveals it in chapter 3 (of 14), and has stated he's not certain that the actual identity of the Ripper can ever be established. Instead, Moore is interested in laying out an argument that the murders were part of the very fabric of nineteenth-century London. Queen Victoria herself commands the murders of the five women who, she believes, intend to blackmail the royal family. Before embarking on his spree, Jack the Ripper takes his accomplice on a tour of the city to show him how Christian London was built upon ground hallowed by pagan goddess religions. Moore

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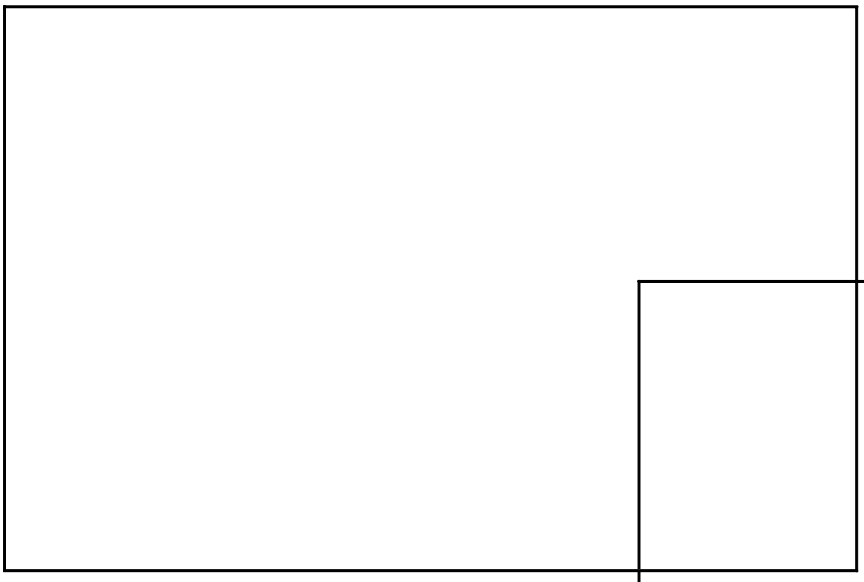

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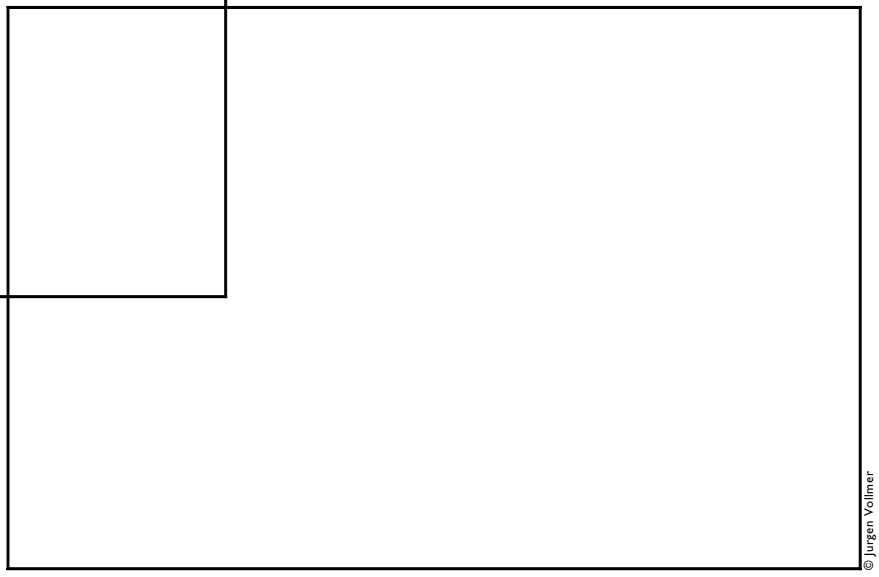
Above: Abberline on the case

Below: Mary Keller (Heather Graham) with Abberline



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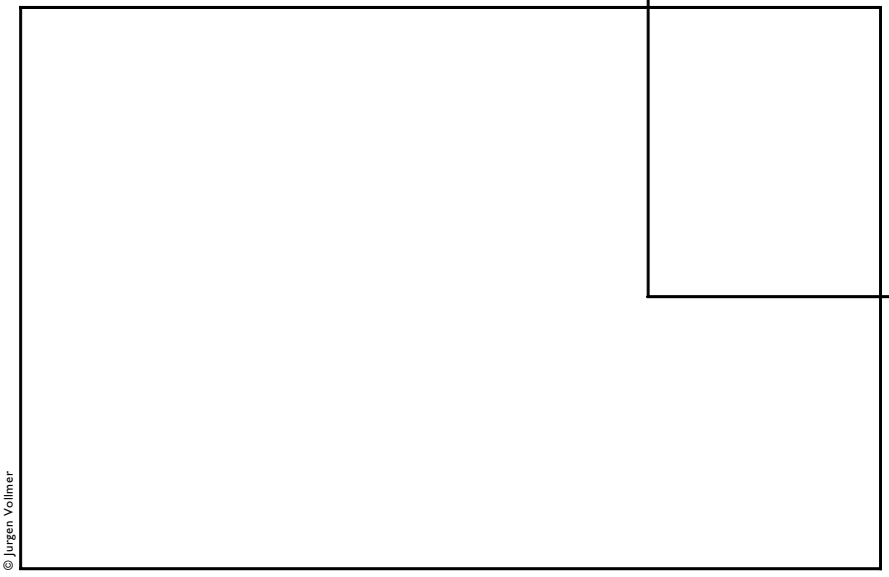
thus makes the murders another expression of a misogyny ingrained into British culture that continually works to suppress women and blames poor women for their lot in life. The hunt for the Ripper, usually the focus of Ripper melodramas, is of secondary importance in Moore's work. Although Inspector Abberline is a prominent character in the book, his discovery of clues and piecing together of the Ripper mystery have less to do with admirable detective work than with the further elaboration of the layers of the conspiracy.

Eddie Campbell's artwork perfectly matches the somber, conspiratorial tone of the narrative. With his black-and-white drawings, Campbell recreates a dirty London that encompasses both grand architecture and impoverished slums. The murders are all graphically shown, but the drawings distance the reader from them, allowing neither fetishistic enjoyment nor moral outrage. And Campbell doesn't glamorize his characters either; the prostitutes are middle-aged women who have lived hard lives and turn to prostitution as the only means of earning a living.

From Hell the film, unfortunately, replaces Moore's and Campbell's perspective with a gaudy London that never seems particularly seedy or even dangerous. In the most telling departure from the source material, the Hugheses and screenwriters Terry Hayes and Rafael Yglesias jettison Moore's dense historical context in favor of a straightforward crime drama in which an intrepid young detective pursues a crafty murderer to the highest levels of government. Queen Victoria doesn't order the murders, though the film implies she had some knowledge of why they were carried out. The identity of the murderer remains hidden until the end of the film, which ends happily if bittersweetly, as one of the prostitutes escapes the Ripper but must forever be apart from the detective with whom she has fallen in love. Campbell's simple, atmospheric black-and-white visuals are replaced by flashy camera movements and vibrant colors. The opening shot of the film cranes down from the London skyline into the slums of the East End, certainly an evocative means of demonstrating the directors' intent to descend into the seedy Victorian underworld. But it also has the effect of separating the East End from the rest of London, the opposite intent of Moore's work. The alleys where the murders take place glisten in gaslight and look nothing like the rubbish-strewn streets where the actual Ripper did his work. Furthermore, the brothers handle the violence of the attacks differently. The murders are implied more than shown, but are staged like the attacks in a typical slasher movie, with the women struggling to reach freedom as a madman hacks at them. In the one graphically presented attack, the actress thrusts her head backwards so the audience can see the gaping



Below: The shadow of the Ripper

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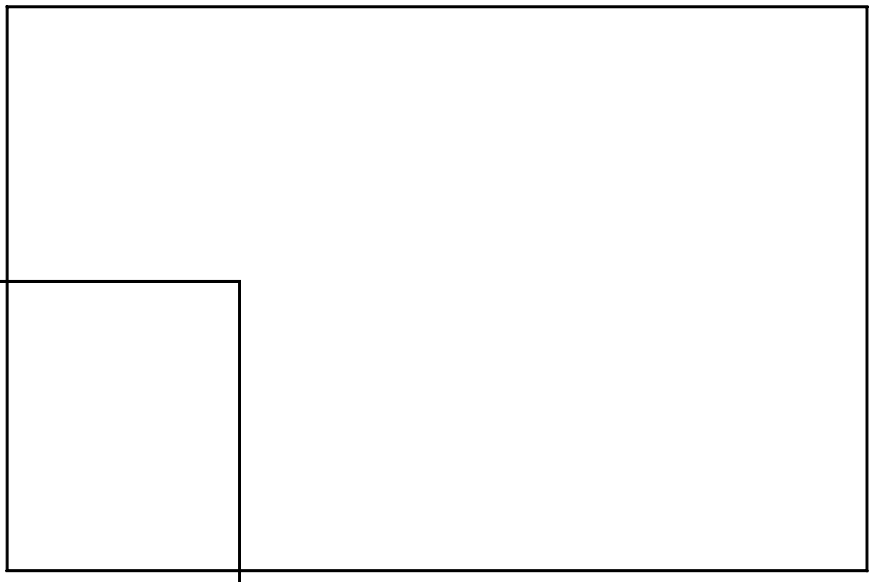

Above: The alluring Mary Kelly

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wound in her throat. During the final murder, copious amounts of crimson blood are present, although the Hugheses avoid presenting the actual butchering.

Many of the changes the filmmakers made can, of course, be attributed to box-office expectations. Inspector Abberline, in reality 45 years old and a decorated veteran of Scotland Yard at the time of the murders, has become the handsome, troubled young loner more in tune with star Johnny Depp's image. The filmmakers also endow Abberline with both psychic powers and an opium habit that provide him with visions of the murders and an intuitive understanding of the nature of the crimes. The Hugheses have noted that Abberline's fictional addiction opened up visually interesting ways of dramatizing the murders, but it also allows them to put chunky blocks of exposition into his mouth. Indeed, the only narrative function of Abberline's addiction and psychic powers is that they provide him with knowledge he couldn't otherwise possess. What unfolds over several chapters in Moore's work becomes desultory, drug-induced summary in the film.

The Hughes brothers take the traditional Hollywood liberties with the prostitutes as well. Whereas Moore and Campbell strove to present them as they really were—"neither the sultry, wanton beauties that they are depicted as being in the more exploitational Ripper movies, nor the disfigured and toothless hags that some writers have described them as [but] ordinary women . . . trying to look attractive for the only job society had seen fit to offer them," as Moore describes them in his appendix—the Hugheses offer up alluring young women who make sure to wash themselves in the public sinks every day. Although Mary Kelly has been described as attractive, she probably did not have the unblemished skin and exquisite bone structure that Heather Graham brings to the role. In a telling comment, the film's executive producer has stated that the filmmakers cast Graham because her beauty "made you want to save her." Presumably a less attractive actress would not have seemed worth saving, leading one to wonder how the actresses who play the murdered prostitutes feel about this.

All of these changes take the film away from the social analysis that makes the source material so rich. By ignoring Moore's well-researched history and social critique, the Hughes brothers have turned their backs on the kind of social critique that made their previous films so fascinating. In *Menace II Society*, for example, the filmmakers linked the crime and drug abuse plaguing South Central Los Angeles to the 1965 Watts riots that damaged the infrastructure of the community, making both an expression of an unfocused rage. Even *Dead Presidents*, until now the brothers'

weakest effort, contextualized the climactic armed robbery by emphasizing the disposable role black males have played in America's wars. None of these nuances color *From Hell*. Except for a few scenes of official interference with Abberline's investigation, the filmmakers avoid any kind of social criticism. Given this unfortunate absence and in light of the amount of time the brothers have spent discussing their desire to make "white movies," one is left with the impression that race and not social and economic criticism has been their chief concern.

The Hughes brothers have an interesting, if perhaps inconsistent, understanding of themselves as filmmakers and of their films. As filmmakers, they downplay their race—although biracial, the brothers consider themselves African American (born in Detroit, Michigan, they were raised by their Armenian-American mother in Pomona, California). Allen Hughes has stated, "We don't consider ourselves black filmmakers, but filmmakers who are black. We could make black movies from here on out, but we're still filmmakers first." This statement draws an interesting distinction between the brothers as filmmakers who are black, which puts their occupation before their race, and their black films, which puts the race before the films themselves. The filmmakers cited by the Hugheses as inspirations and influences mirror this split. The brothers claim that the success of Spike Lee and Robert Townsend—"people who look like we do making films"—inspired them to become filmmakers. However, the directors they frequently mention as stylistic influences include Martin Scorsese and Brian De Palma—people who don't look like they do. Being identified with African-American filmmakers rankles the brothers. Albert once remarked about Spike Lee, "He may have opened doors, but it hurt us too, because of the kind of questions you're asking right now. Martin Scorsese never gets asked, 'You're an Italian-American filmmaker, do you plan to make Italian movies in the future?' Steven Spielberg doesn't get asked about being Jewish. That's bothersome." Furthermore, the brothers have expressed a desire to stop making movies that can be identified as black. Discussing their reasons for making *From Hell*, Albert rhetorically asked, "Do we want to make films, or do we want to make so-called 'black movies'? We answered that one [with *From Hell*]."

So far, the Hugheses have not directly addressed their definition of "so-called 'black movies,'" but we can perhaps surmise from other remarks that a black movie features a predominantly African-American cast and setting, regardless of intended audience. In an interview with *Time* magazine, the brothers argued that as long as they made black movies, white actors would not want to work with them. Furthermore, they have claimed that their intended audience for *Menace* wasn't African Americans, but white Americans. Talking with Elvis Mitchell, Albert Hughes noted that "We wanted to do that film so white people would understand what was going on down there [in Watts]. We didn't do it so much for black people to enjoy as a movie." In other words, even when they made "black movies," they hoped to reach a specifically non-black audience.

Nor do the Hugheses indicate specific thematic material as being unique to black movies. One reason they chose to do *From Hell*, a "film" and not a "black movie," was that it offered the opportunity to present themes they've explored before. "This is a ghetto story," noted Albert in the press kit. "It concerns poverty, violence and corruption, which are themes we deal with in our movies because they fascinate us. These particular characters happen to be white, but all poor people have the same problems." In other words, non-black films can also be ghetto films, and thus films dealing with these issues are not necessarily black. That the Hugheses consider *From Hell*, with its all-white cast and London setting, a film and not a black movie indicates that the elements that comprise a black movie are a predominately African-American cast and a setting dominated by African Americans.

The Hughes brothers saw *From Hell* as an attempt to depart from their previous films by working with white actors and outside of a modern urban setting while continuing to examine the themes that concern them. And the public notices the film received, both positive and negative, reveal one of the possible reasons the brothers might have had for wanting to separate themselves from black movies. In both pre-release coverage and in reviews of the movie, commentators openly questioned whether their "'hood movies" could have prepared the Hughes brothers to make a film about Victorian London. Charles Taylor, in a review posted at Salon.com, called the film the work of "a pair of small boys." Even positive notices equated the film with the brothers' earlier work. Attempting to pick up on their characterization of *From Hell* as a ghetto movie, J. Hoberman argued that the filmmakers "[link] this vision of women being brutalized, gutted, and lobotomized with the 'hood movies that made their reputation," a telling point, given that the Hugheses cited the thematic material and not violence as the common thread between *From Hell* and their other

works. In fact, Hoberman's comparison doesn't hold true. On several textual points, *From Hell* differs appreciably from the brothers' previous works: the only prostitutes are those in the margins of *American Pimp*, and drugs are secondary material in *Menace* and *Presidents*. Nor are any of the women in their other films disemboweled or lobotomized. Furthermore, policemen are the heroes in *From Hell*, inverting their roles as oppressors in *Menace* and *Dead Presidents*.

The responses of reviewers, both positive and negative, trade on the assumption that the Hughes brothers, and African-American filmmakers in general, do not have the capacity to make films substantially different from modern urban crime dramas featuring characters appropriate to that genre. That the themes the Hugheses explore could appear in other kinds of films by non-white directors seems to have escaped many critics. Unable to find any other language than references to "the 'hood" or previous Hughes brothers films to describe *From Hell*, the critics reinscribe the Hughes brothers within a filmic ghetto, positioning them tacitly as black filmmakers and not filmmakers who are black. But at the same time, the attitude of the Hughes brothers toward their own identity and their classification of the kinds of films they have made indicate a similarly problematic attitude towards race and film. Other African-American filmmakers have stated they consider only a script's quality and not its racial component when selecting projects, but then they haven't set aside a separate class of "black film" to escape from. By minimizing their race as filmmakers but not minimizing race when it comes to films, the Hughes brothers perpetuate the attitude that certain kinds of situations belong only in a racialized kind of film. They may want to continue to make "ghetto" films that explore themes related to economic disenfranchisement, but they have indicated they no longer want to do so within a black framework. In other words, they want to escape race, but not the subject matter. Which is certainly understandable; to insist that non-white filmmakers limit themselves to films about the modern urban non-white underclass is, as Harry White has argued (in an article published in the *Village Voice*, Oct. 3, 1995) about expectations of other African-American filmmakers, to "burden [them] with the rope chain of 'reality' in ways that white people simply aren't." The comments the brothers have made about Martin Scorsese not being questioned in the same way over his choice of subject matter strike true: no one doubted his ability to direct a movie like *The Age of Innocence*—though some wondered why he wanted to. But on the other hand, commentators did question Steven Spielberg as the appropriate choice for *Schindler's List* (1993), as he had studiously avoided making any reference to Judaism in his other films. However, no one questioned the Hughes brothers' credentials to make *Menace II Society* and *Dead Presidents* because they were black, although neither brother has ever lived in the urban settings of either film. Indeed, the brothers made *Menace* because they felt that John Singleton's *Boyz N the Hood* (1991) reflected not an urban but rather a Hollywood (which necessarily connotes whiteness) frame of reference. By painting the Singleton film as not urban enough, the Hugheses come very close to claiming it wasn't *black* enough. Thus, when it suited them, the brothers have traded on a black identity to secure the authority of their films, albeit for the edification of a white audience.

In the end, the controversy over *From Hell* demonstrates the continued tension between cultural expectations of racial identity and the liberal individualist ideal that artistic expression exists outside of racial boundaries. The reviewers who tied *From Hell* to the Hughes brothers' earlier films probably did not intend to denigrate the brothers' creativity, but to place the film within a larger auteurist context. And the Hughes brothers may not intend to impugn "black movies," but instead hope to stake out a claim that as artists they have a vision that expands beyond racial boundaries. Nonetheless, the critics and the filmmakers alike succeeded in continuing a kind of cycle of denial of films by and about African Americans. Trapped on one hand by cultural expectations that they make films only from an African-American perspective and on the other hand by their selective rejection of those expectations, the Hughes brothers find themselves relegating black movies to the cultural ghetto. And in their efforts to escape this trap, they have made a film about life in another ghetto that features flashy visuals and a mechanical murder plot instead of the stark historical concerns of its source material. Ironically, perhaps we can say *From Hell* isn't black enough: it fails not because the Hughes brothers don't have the skills to capture the nuances of Victorian London, but because they neglect to provide their "white film" with the social insight they have demonstrated in their "black movies."

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Ali

Director: Michael Mann. Producers: Paul Ardaji, A. Kitman Ho, James Lassiter, Mann, Jon Peters. Writers: Mann, Eric Roth, Stephen Rivele, Christopher Wilkinson. Cinematographer: Emmanuel Lubezki. Columbia Pictures.

The first minutes of Michael Mann's *Ali* are beautifully shot and, in retrospect, representative of the film's twin weaknesses. Set in 1964, they show the great heavyweight champion (played by Will Smith), then a 22-year-old named Cassius Clay, in training for his historic first fight with Sonny Liston. Interwoven with those shots are scenes of Ali's friend, the soul singer Sam Cooke, performing for a crowd composed mostly of hysterical women. The Ali/Cooke comparison subtly points to Ali's status as the first truly sexy heavyweight champ. But once that has been accomplished, Cooke takes a quick stroll through the champ's hotel room—and out of the movie, which does not show or refer to him again. (He was killed late in the same year.) The singer is thus a harbinger of factual elements that are dealt with haphazardly, or just plain ignored, in the rest of the movie. But it is in the shots of young Clay/Ali that we find a metaphor for the film's worst flaw. In the training scenes, we see a frontal close-up of the boxer as he hits a punching bag; the bag flies back and forth in front of him, making that famously pretty face appear as it would on the rapidly moving images of an old-fashioned film reel. The point, no doubt, is to emphasize the larger-than-life, ready-for-the movies nature of Ali both as a person and as a fighter. But this choice is perhaps more apt than Mann realizes: the Ali he proceeds to give us is the one-dimensional version we already know from TV and magazines, and even that isn't intact. Instead of adding depth to this image, Mann's *Ali* takes an Exacto knife to it. Here is a case in which less is less.

What circumstances helped to form the man who became possibly the greatest boxer of all time, the fighter whose name and face are known—two decades after his last fight—by people who can't name the current heavyweight champ? The answers provided by *Ali* are so sketchy as to be meaningless. This is because Mann, in trying to squeeze into one film what might have filled a trilogy, not only leaves out important aspects of Ali's story, but also doesn't allow himself the time to explain what he does present. Over and over, we are given the what of Ali's life but not the why, with the result that key events appear to take place in a vacuum, like one of Ali's punches: they're there and gone so fast you're not sure what happened. One example is Ali's joining the Nation of Islam. His receptivity to its strict, separatist philosophy was the result of the racism to which he had been subjected early in his life, but the examples of such racism in *Ali* are reduced to headlines: we see the boy Cassius on a bus, stealing a glimpse of a newspaper account of the murder of Emmett Till. His personal encounters with racism are limited to a scene in which a cop asks him as he does his road work in preparation for a fight, "What you running from, boy?" Thus when Ali later in the film explains his refusal to fight in Vietnam with the celebrated line, "No Viet Cong ever called me nigger," the response of the uninitiated could well be, "So what? Nobody else did, either."

But back to the Nation of Islam . . . its teachings are represented for Ali, so the film would make one think, almost wholly by Malcolm X, played here adequately if not excitingly by Mario Van Peebles. Confusion thus results when, after Malcolm's well-documented differences with Elijah Muhammad and the Nation have begun, Ali takes the side of the Nation. When next we see Malcolm, he is gunned down; cut to Ali, a tear rolling down his cheek as the wistful "A Change Is Gonna Come" plays on the soundtrack. (Which raises an interesting question: If you feature a Sam Cooke song in a movie in which Cooke is a character, why use the Al Green version?)

Mann's handling of Ali's boxing career brings to mind what Spencer Tracy said about Katharine Hepburn's figure: What's there is choice. The fights depicted here—particularly those against Sonny Liston (Michael Bent) and George Foreman (Charles Shufford)—come as close as anything since *Raging Bull* to conveying a sense of what it's like to be in the ring. The spinning camera shots allow us to experience a boxer's disorientation, and one can almost *feel* the punches Ali absorbs on the ropes as he lets Foreman wear himself out. But the problems with the fights in *Ali* are that they point up, by contrast, the static nature of what takes place inbetween them, and that they, like nearly everything else in the movie, are presented without the buildup necessary to make their significance clear. Take the Joe Frazier fight. Ali's first bout with Frazier (James N. Toney), in 1971, occurred when he had only recently returned to boxing after three and a half years, having been stripped of his heavyweight title and denied the chance to fight because of his refusal to be inducted into the army. Ali thus faced Frazier after having spent the prime of his ring life out-

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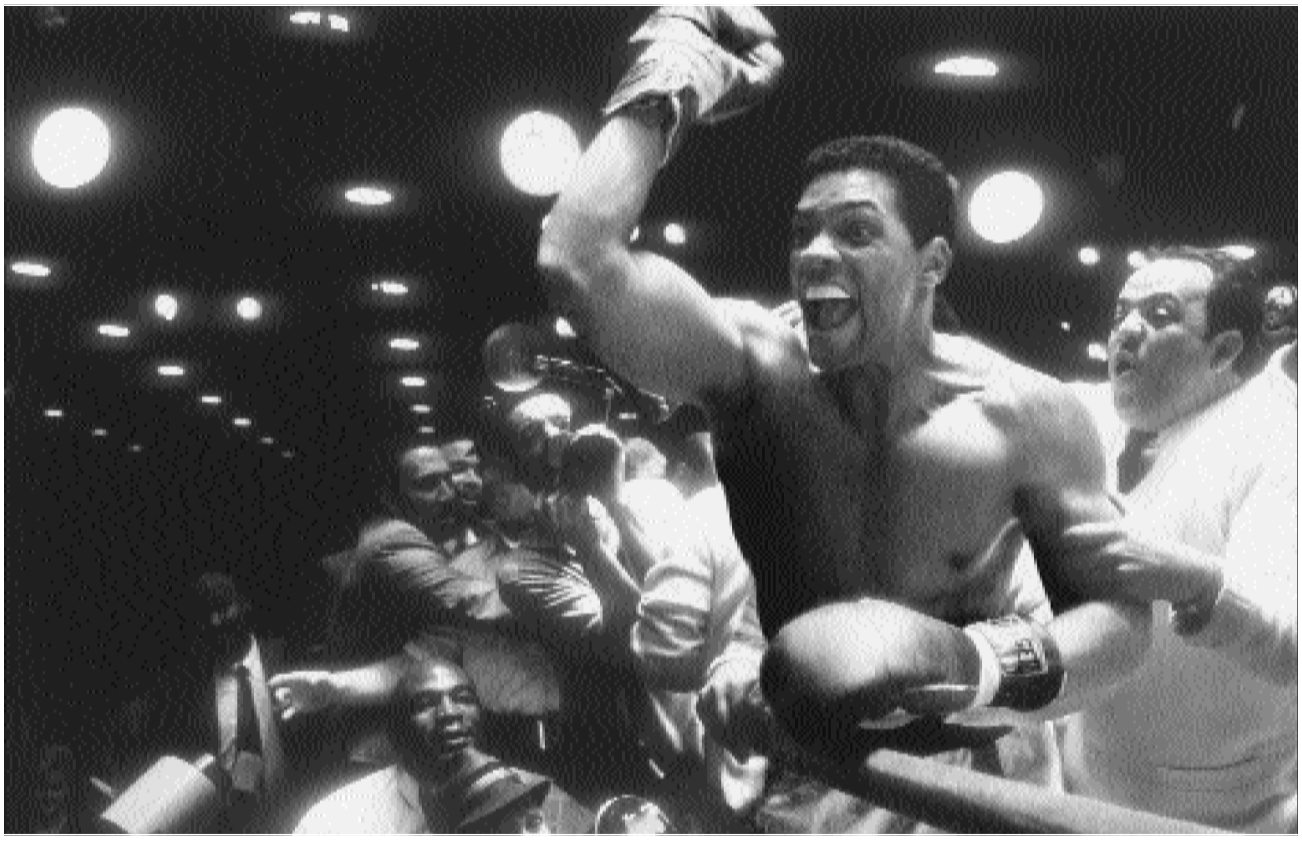
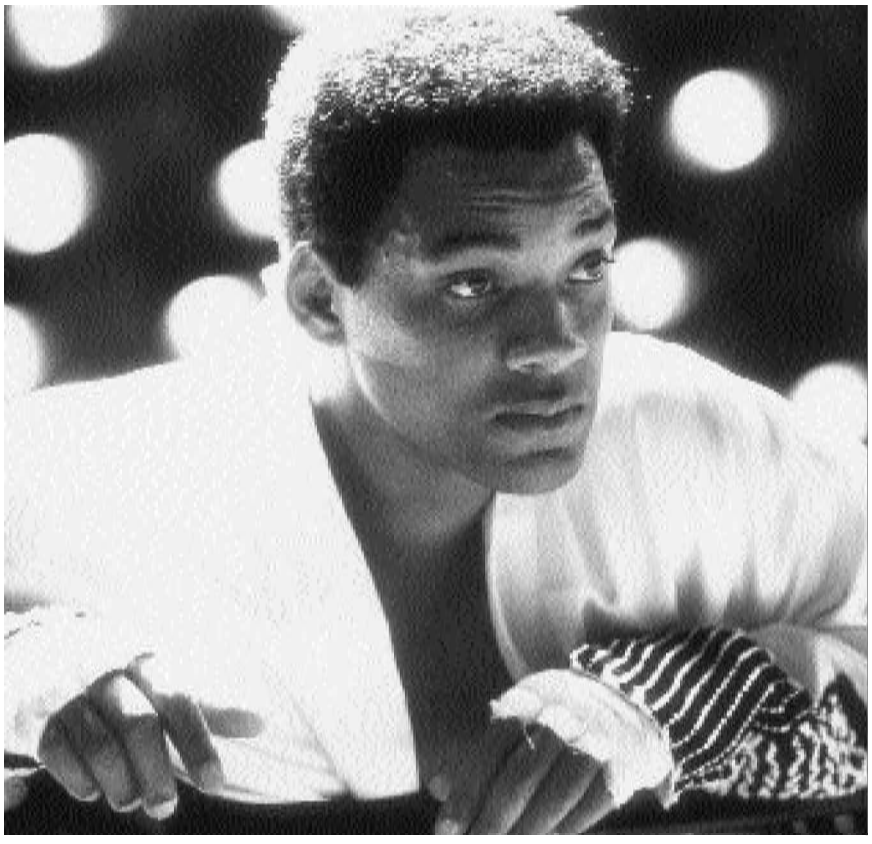


Sting like a bee: Will Smith as Muhammad Ali

side the ring. But since the movie downplays the passage of time, Ali's loss to Frazier comes across not as the struggle of a fighter robbed of the best years of his career but as a simple case of losing to a better fighter.

It is getting late in the movie at this point; and so *Ali*, like a boxer who knows he is behind on the judges' scorecards, begins to move faster as its aim becomes less sure. The story now jumps ahead three and a half years, to the Foreman fight—completely missing the second Ali/Frazier match (won by Ali!), which is one of the most celebrated fights in boxing history, and likewise making no mention of Ken Norton, the fighter who defeated Ali in one (some would say two) of their three matches, breaking his jaw in the process. The Ali/Foreman fight, held in Zaire in the fall of 1974 and billed as "The Rumble in the Jungle," was nearly incidental to the story that was taking place around it. Mann could have made a whole film about those events, except that it might have been superfluous in light of Leon Gast's excellent 1996 documentary on the same subject, *When We Were Kings*. (Come to think of it, a viewer would do well at this point in Mann's movie to switch over to Gast's.) The Rumble was promoted in grand fashion by the hyper-loquacious, preternaturally shrewd, hard-as-bricks former convict Don King. Hosting the fight was Zaire's leader, Mobutu Sese Seko, the brutal dictator and plunderer of his nation's mineral wealth, whose own contribution to the events tells all one needs to know about the quality of his leadership. According to Norman Mailer's book *The Fight*, Mobutu, in order to clean up the city of Kinshasa in time for the Rumble, ordered police to round up 300 known criminals, a random 50 of whom were then shot to death underneath the very stadium in which Ali would face Foreman. How is all of this dealt with in *Ali*? Mobutu is shown very briefly, sitting at a table and looking like the villain in a Bugs Bunny cartoon; most of what we learn about him and King is tossed off in a few lines of dialogue during an argument between Ali and his wife (Nona Gaye). Mykelti Williamson gives a quick, entertaining turn as King, in all his long-finger-nailed, high-voltage-haired glory, but for the most part these rich story ingredients are served uncooked—or not at all. No mention is made of



the prisoners' execution, or of the widely publicized story that when the fight had to be postponed because Foreman got a cut over his eye, Mobutu protected his investment by keeping the fighters in Zaire with the use of armed guards. As with many other aspects of *Ali*, prior knowledge of events is needed to make sense of what is going on; but such knowledge guarantees frustration over what is left out.

Adding to the frustration is the fact that *Ali* features fine performances. The pumped-up Will Smith succeeds in capturing not only Ali's cadence and cocksureness but the simple—in the best sense—soul they adorn. Jamie Foxx, looking like Denzel Washington's ne'er-do-well brother, does a good job as Ali's sweet loser of a cornerman, Drew "Bundini" Brown. One area in which the film does actually venture below the surface of events is its depiction of the behind-the-scenes affection between Ali and the men with whom he publicly traded insults and punches. Jon Voight makes a fine Howard Cosell, Ali's nemesis and friend. And one of the sweetest moments in the film finds the now title-less Ali riding in a car with Joe Frazier—who has become champ in his absence—and pleading with Frazier to fight him. Frazier tells Ali he will do so, promises to defeat him resoundingly (or words to that effect), and then asks him if he needs any money in the meantime.

Would that these performances had been given in a movie that made them matter. Smith's Ali is a good characterization, all dressed up with nowhere to go. The script attempts much too late to reveal different sides of the man: when, for instance, the married Ali falls for another woman in Zaire and makes no secret of it, his wife objects to being publicly humiliated, explaining that this is worse than his previous "casual" affairs—the first we have heard of such things. Ali then confides to the Other Woman (later his third wife) that he should have found Islam at age 50 because his youthful weakness for women conflicts with its tenets. An interesting idea, subsequently abandoned.

Michael Mann has directed or executive-produced a number of handsome, high-profile, action-driven films and TV shows, such as the movie *Heat* and the series "Miami Vice." Like that show, *Ali* has some flashy effects whose purposes are not clear. Perhaps film, a visual medium after all, does not have to justify looking pretty, but it's fair to ask why *Ali* periodically shifts from color to sepia. The answer may be that Mann made certain shots look like old photos in order to stress the historic nature of what is represented; but if so, this backfires for the same reasons that the opening shots of Clay/Ali in training do.

The movie ends with the Ali/Foreman fight—fittingly, since Ali's victory over the angry young giant was the last great—and arguably least expected—win of his career. (There were many who feared Ali would not survive the match, much less stand over the horizontal Foreman at the end of it.) The very last shot is a freeze frame of Ali with his hands raised in triumph. But having this pose cap the entire film, and not simply the fight, begs the question, Triumph over what? What is this movie about? Perhaps the answer is: the man we already know. But *Ali* fails to give us even him.

Clifford Thompson is the editor of *Current Biography*. His essay on the films of Charles Burnett was included in *The Best American Movie Writing 1999*.

Film Quarterly
Annual Film Book Survey

PART ONE

Abstracting Reality

Art, Communication, and Cognition in the Digital Age

By Mark J. P. Wolf. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2000. $64.00 cloth; $39.50 paper.

Abstracting Reality offers an interesting *bottom-up* approach to questions related to the effects of digitization upon human perception, art, and communication. This approach is evident in the construction of the book's overall argument and in the layout of particular arguments within it. The first part of the book centers mostly upon detailed, innovative, and enlightening descriptions of technological developments, working its way up to the presumed perceptual and cultural effects of computerized digitization. The author lays down most of the theoretical framework and assumptions in the second part of the book.

From this final part it becomes evident that the author posits an overvalued notion of a primal sensual perception of reality, comprehended as organic, full, and continuous. He appears to relate this perception to knowledge somehow induced from lived, direct, sensual experience (222-23). He contrasts this overvalued notion to an abstraction of such reality perception brought about mainly by intermediary technologies, which, because based upon mathematical constructs, elicit a quantization of perception. The author outlines historical trajectories in the fields of art, science, and social interaction based upon these premises and characterized by an escalating mathematics-based abstraction that reaches its summit in present binary-based digital technologies. The latter, he claims, have generated a level of abstraction of direct experience that reconfigures our perceptual and cognitive apparatus, resulting among other things in what Jameson has termed a waning of affect and in our acceptance of mathematics-based speculation about the world as scientific truth.

Quantification is the key word Mark Wolf uses to describe the process we are undergoing, and which the digital media take to extremes. Hence in the first part of the book he claims that our notions of time, space, value, and information have undergone a shift from a presumed richly nuanced and subjective perception to a quantified, numbered, and objectifying perception. Particularly interesting is Wolf's tracing of the quantification of information made possible by the development of ways "to express information numerically" (17). With his account of the development of numbering systems, he shows how numbering began to be used for written information such as book pages, chapters, and in some cases even lines and verses (the Bible). He then shows how this expanded into library cataloguing systems (most obviously, the Dewey system). He correlates this process to the mathematization of science (from Descartes to Mandelbrot's fractal geometry) and the quantification of social life through statistical methods. Hence, "information is increasingly abstracted . . . qualitative differences reinterpreted and abstracted into measurable quantitative ones" (20). Wolf's conclusion is that in the digital age, quantification of information and its mathematical manipulation has reached an unprecedented scale because of the possibility

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of representing visual, textual, auditory, and other information with ones and zeroes. Hence quantization, the quality of quantity, reigns supreme.

Within this overall theoretical framework, the author offers detailed bottom-up accounts of the technological developments that led to the invention of computers and of the effects of computerization on communication systems and on art production. He offers clear and interestingly instantiated explanations of the evolution of signifying systems, from smoke signals through to the Internet, using excellent quotes taken from a variety of professional and popular sources such as the *Wall Street Journal*, *Wired*, or *LAN Times*. Moreover, he suggests some interesting hypotheses on predicted cultural shifts derived from digital technologies, such as shifts in the field of aesthetics. He borrows, for example, Nelson Goodman's distinction between autographic and allographic forms of artistic production to claim that digital art is primarily allographic, since it is non-unique and favors repetitive patterns and variations over unique, complex, and nuanced formal configurations. He derives this from the need to adjust the work into grid-type formations and from the inherent tendency of computerized technologies to compress information given memory storage limitations. He also suggests interesting insights into predicted changes in the traditional formation of films, derived primarily from the affordability of image-compositing in digitized filmmaking. Thus he traces a tendency to discard the shot and the cut transition between shots as basic elements of cinematic articulation, given the various types of spatial transitions and transmutations within a digitized audiovisual segment representing motion.

While some of Wolf's hypotheses about the effects of computerized technologies are interesting and innovative, others are either weak or have been dealt with more comprehensively elsewhere. For example, when dealing with digital culture, the author offers poor and brief analyses of cardinal films and literary works on the subject (e.g., the film *Tron* or Gibson's book *Neuromancer*). His discussion of these works is mostly confined to content analysis taken at face value, and leads to conclusions that hardly go beyond claims such as that "VR [Virtual Reality] is a contested technology producing a contested virtual space" (231). Had the author discussed other, more comprehensive and detailed analyses of these and other works carried out from perspectives differing from his (for instance, Scott Bukatman's 1994 *Terminal Identity*), his argument would have been enriched.

However, the major problem I have with this book concerns its overall theoretical framework. The author offers a naïve notion of our sensual perception of reality and a confounded notion of reality, thus weakening his argument about reality's abstraction. He presents a rather crude and somewhat romantic sensualism, since he seems to be assuming that primal sensual perceptions or direct sensual experiences are based upon, and generated by, a full, organic, and continuous reality (222-23). He contrasts this overvalued notion to an abstraction of such reality perception by intermediary technologies, which, because based upon mathematical constructs, elicit a quantization of perception. However, the author's technological determinism overlooks the fact that mathematical abstraction is an ongoing faculty of the human mind irrespective of intermediary technologies. Also, the author's clear-cut separation between perception and conception, upon which he bases his predilection for direct sensual experience of reality, has been questioned by bottom-up cognitivists (e.g., Julian Hochberg, "The Perception of Moving Images," *Iris* no. 9 [Spring 1989], 41-48). They have persuasively shown that the notion that sensual perception is unstructured or differently structured than top-down abstract conceptual processes is untenable. According to their view, bottom-up sensual perceptions automatically embed hypotheses about the world and precipitate sensual data in ways that do not differ in their basic structures from top-down conscious conceptual processes. Thus, we make automatic presumptions about distance between objects. For example, if two objects partly overlap, we will presume the partly hidden one to be behind the one in full view. These presumptions are a source for different sensual misapprehensions and are exploited by many artworks.

Moreover, not only is the author's notion of sensual perception naïve, but his notion of the reality sensed inadvertently swings from crude materialism to plain idealism. This emerges in his misappropriation of the works of Walter Benjamin and André Bazin. Wolf is right in appropriating these works, since they revolve, like his, around the tension between an overvalued posited reality outside human perception and the effects entailed in its conceptual abstraction by the human mind. However, Benjamin and Bazin consistently ground their claims upon such posited reality, whereas Wolf doesn't. Benjamin grounds his notion of an artwork's cult value primarily upon its unique existence in a particular time and place, from which derive the artwork's aura and inaccessibility, qualities that generate its cult values. Furthermore, Benjamin claims that in the age of mechanical reproduction, where the work loses its material origin and uniqueness, cult values are lost. The author, however, claims that the non-origin-based digital work has cult values, as did the inaccessible origin-based artwork (65-67). This is due to the intangibility of the computerized processes generating digital imaging, which makes the digital work inaccessible. The author thus conflates Benjamin's inaccessibility with computerized digital intangibility.

This conflation overlooks the primacy Benjamin gave to the material existence of the artwork, from which existence aura and cult emanate. The author, by this conflation, shifts from Benjamin's material-based conception of reality to an idealist conception. Likewise, when Bazin writes about the "myth of total cinema," he claims it is propelled by a striving to asymptotically immerse the viewer within a phenomenal reality generated by a world beyond human perception, which film, being this reality's fingerprint, should reveal rather than construct. The author however, conflates Bazin's phenomenal revelatory immersion with cyberspace's strive for immersion within an a-priori fabricated digitized reality (205; 225). Hence he inadvertently puts on an equal footing perceived material reality and perceived digitized simulation of reality. In so doing, he both misrepresents these

thinkers' arguments and inadvertently problematizes his own notion of reality. While he seems to posit a favored material reality beyond human perception, which he naïvely claims is perceived by our senses as full, nuanced, and continuous, his claim that simulated reality has the (lamented) capacity to fully emulate material reality puts digitized and material reality on an equal ontological footing. If so, why is the notion of a full, organic, and continuous reality less abstract than quantized reality?

Finally, Wolf's misrepresentation of positions closer to his own is accompanied by the omission of prominent positions other than his own. He does not mention the work of Baudrillard or Haraway. Their perspective on issues related to the digital age center around the notion that reality was never more than a conceptual fabrication whose ontological status was always a matter of power rather than truth, and that only today, with the advent of the digital age, is this becoming common knowledge. Had Wolf addressed such notions, which are found in many of the writings on the digital age, his own position would have been better clarified and he would have offered a serious challenge to these positions. The book's strength lies in its broad-based description of the historical trajectories leading to present-day computerized technologies, and its concrete examples of how technological processes may be reconfiguring human perception.

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The Big Tomorrow

Hollywood and the Politics of the American Way

By Lary May. University of Chicago Press, 2000. $32.50.

One fascinating topic which film and cultural studies invite us to explore is the relationship between film and American culture in the twentieth century. Historian Lary May, who teaches in American Studies at the University of Minnesota, engaged a part of that topic in his first book, *Screening Out the Past*, which treated American silent cinema and focused especially on how movies in the 1920s helped to erode Victorian values while celebrating those of a new consumer culture.

In some ways *The Big Tomorrow* picks up where that previous book left off. As Professor May tells us in his introduction, the American film industry "played an important role in reshaping nationalism and public life" between the 1930s and the 1960s. The core argument of the book runs something like this: Before FDR and the New Deal, the United States was "largely an isolationist nation rooted in values of an Anglo-Saxon America that had marginalized women, ethnic minorities and people of color from public life." Although a more racially and ethnically inclusive version of Americanism developed in the movies and culture of the 1930s, World War II and the Cold War reversed the trend, fostering a more exclusive vision of America as a place of abundance, white suburbs, and the nuclear family. Although some in the film industry resisted that trend in the 1940s and 1950s, the exclusive vision became dominant until the 1960s saw a return to and solidification of a "more tolerant and inclusive" sense of American nationality (1-2).

May develops his argument through two major parts of three chapters each. Part One, "The Modern Republic Comes of Age," concentrates on the 1930s. Chapter 1 examines the films of Will Rogers, who was, according to *Film Daily*, the biggest male box-office draw in the movies between 1933 and 1935. May argues that Rogers' films updated a nineteenth-century "inclusive republican creed in which citizens cooperated to realize dreams of abundance and pluralism" (52). Chapter 2 broadens the argument by extending it to many other films of the 1930s, while in chapter 3 May moves to an examination of movie theater architecture with a fascinating discussion of the cultural significance of the shift away from "movie palace" architecture in the 1930s toward a more modern design based on Chicago School aesthetics and defended by architect Ben Schlanger. According to May, the "modern" architecture of the 1930s eliminated the exotic historical design and class distinctions of the movie palaces and concentrated instead on egalitarian seating, uniform sight lines, and a closer connection between the audience and the screen.

The three chapters of Part Two, "The American Way and Its Discontent," focus on how the movies and American culture changed during the World War II and Cold War years through about 1960. Chapter 4 shows how movies during WW II turned away from the inclusive creed of 1930s films toward a new American nationalism centered on consumerism, a vision of classlessness, and the "privatized suburban home" (139). The fifth chapter examines how the film industry, led by MPPA head Eric Johnston, moved toward the political right during the later 1940s and the 1950s not only in industry politics but also in the movies: instead of Will Rogers, the prototypical hero of the postwar era was John Wayne. Chapter 6 treats seeds of discontent during this same period of Cold War consensus, creating an interesting link between the more socially critical strands of film noir (particularly those directed by Billy Wilder and John Huston) and the rebellious star images of Marilyn Monroe, Marlon Brando, and James Dean.

The book also includes a useful appendix that traces changing ideology in movies through a periodic sampling of reviews in *Film Daily* between 1920 and 1960. This appendix includes 31 charts and graphs that mark changes in such categories as "Films Featuring Big Business Villains" (highest between 1930 and 1938); "Films Featuring Marriage/Romance Across Class Lines" (highest in 1938, lowest in 1946 and 1958); "Films Ending in Violence" (steadily growing after 1946 to a peak in 1958); and "Films Featuring Anti-Heroes" (peaking in 1946). Although it's not always clear how determinations were made (just what constitutes an anti-hero, for example?), the charts and graphs provide an interesting set of trends that support Professor May's broad argument.

The book has considerable strengths. The notes make it clear that Professor May has immersed himself in the considerable secondary literature on American film and society between 1930 and 1960. As a trained historian, the author is more conversant with American historiography than many film historians, which at times gives his work a depth that film history sometimes lacks. He has also scoured a number of libraries for useful and illuminating archival material. I was especially interested in his discussion of movie theater design in the 1930s, which was based on fresh and sometime local materials, including a wide variety of photographs of theater interiors and exteriors. Finally, in his discussions of movies, the connection between left-wing film noir and the nascent rebellious star images of Monroe, Brando, and Dean was suggestive, and the discussions of *Double Indemnity*, *The Treasure of Sierra Madre*, and *Asphalt Jungle* were especially strong.

Film scholars may find some other elements in the book less successful. The broad generalizations on the ideological implications of film style (147, for example) seemed much less assured and convincing than other parts of the book—although I'm happy to see a historian engaging with questions of film style. The book also contains some inaccuracies of detail. For example, the author asserts that Chaplin left the country for Switzerland when Congress called on Chaplin to testify (202). In fact, Chaplin was subpoenaed by HUAC in 1947 before the Hollywood Ten trials and was excused from testifying after sending the Committee a telegram saying he wasn't a Communist. He left the country a half-decade later to attend the London premiere of *Limelight*, after which his reentry permit was revoked by the U.S. Attorney General. Plot details are also sometimes off: for example, it's not the protagonist (John Garfield's Joe Morse) who dies at the end of *Force of Evil*, as May claims (230), but his brother, whose body Morse discovers at the base of a bridge in the final scene.

Finally, I believe Professor May overstates Hollywood's commitment in the 1930s to marginalized Americans, particularly immigrants and African Americans, and to leftist ideology. I watched some of Will Rogers' mid-1930s films again while preparing this review, and I can't see much in them that's progressive about the treatment of African Americans. To be sure, there was an active Hollywood left in the 1930s, and Professor May follows others, like Larry Ceplair and Stephen Englund, in asserting that point. However, leftist commitment was strongest among the creative talent—as opposed to those in administrative and financial control of the studios—and leftist ideology also diminished in American movies after the Production Code began to be enforced more strictly after June 1934 and the legislation of the Second New Deal in 1935. Many of the movies that Professor May discusses as evidence of social critique in Hollywood movies—like the gangster and the fallen women films—were next to impossible to make after the Code began to be more strictly enforced in 1934. Of course, some populist sentiment appears in Hollywood movies after 1934—it's certainly evident in movies like *Stagecoach* (1939) and *Grapes of Wrath* (1940), for example—but the portrayal of the Apaches in the former film hardly affirms the "inclusive" multicultural Americanism at the center of the author's contention about the 1930s. I'm more convinced by historians like Richard Pells and Robert Sklar, who see a diminishment of leftist thought and ideology in late 1930s American culture.

Yet the strengths of the book clearly outweigh its occasional limitations. Lary May's *The Big Tomorrow* is on the whole a serious and engaged work of historical scholarship that film and cultural historians need to read, think about, and discuss.

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Blockbuster TV

Must-see Sitcoms in the Network Era

By Janet Staiger. New York: New York University Press, 2000. $50.00 cloth; $16.95 paper.

Water-cooler gatherings throughout the U.S. during summer 2000 and winter-spring 2001 were abuzz about the widely successful airing of the CBS reality-based program "Survivor." This show blew away the competition both in its initial Borneo version—in which it went up against weak summer programming—and its refined Australia version. "Survivor: The Australian Outback" routinely beat up such prime-time ratings bullies as NBC's "Friends" and drew around 30 million viewers per week, over seven million more than the second most popular program that season, "ER."

Janet Staiger, in her book *Blockbuster TV*, wants to understand TV phenoms like "Survivor" that seem every so often to dominate U.S. television and commentary about it. The author, a much-published film historian, tackles television history in this book; the film metaphor she uses in the book's title ("blockbuster") perhaps reveals her cinematic background. The book focuses on four extraordinarily popular sitcoms that, she argues, were ratings busters for their time (significantly above the second- and third-highest rated programs), generated much public discussion, and each time rejuvenated the sitcom formula. Using meticulous ratings analyses to justify her selections, Staiger devotes a chapter each to "The Beverly Hillbillies," "All in the Family," "Happy Days/Laverne & Shirley" (she lumps these as a unified pair), and "The Cosby Show," with these shows' blockbuster status being used as the framing device for her discussion.

The book embraces an interesting and ambitious multiperspectival approach in order to address the success of the programs. Besides discussing the ratings trends and the demographic makeup of these shows in depth, the author also brings in the industrial context of television at the time of each program, the rhetoric of public commentaries about

the shows' various appeals and controversies (she labels such commentaries "surrogate consumers"), textual analysis of representative episodes during the programs' blockbuster status formation, and a sensitivity to audience reception and the polysemic potential for viewer interpretation and identification. Although she is hesitant to proclaim the final authoritative reasons for the shows' successes, Staiger argues that the four blockbuster programs potentially have both individual explanations for their success and more generic characteristics. For "The Beverly Hillbillies," for example, she highlights the importance of highly visible public discussions of the show's humor and how these discussions came during a time in which TV's nature as a "vast wasteland" was being debated. "Laverne & Shirley," on the other hand, was successful because of the performance chemistry and unique nature of the two female protagonists and the specific version of slapstick comedy performed by the show. The author wonders if the friendly, accessible characters, domestic nature, and class dynamics of all four shows collectively enhanced a pleasurable polysemy that encouraged their popularity.

The book is exceptionally well written, which makes it accessible for those not familiar with heavy-duty television studies or those only casually familiar with television history or these particular programs. Additionally, Staiger's unique emphasis on ratings analysis may provide media studies scholars with a new angle on the shows' popularity and place in history. Film scholars looking for definitive treatments of the programs may be a bit disappointed, as the author acknowledges. In fact, there are a few times when readers may want to read more about the author's insights into these programs and the trends they established. At one point early in the book, a 12-page table visually depicts the longevity and overlap of popular sitcoms, yet only one paragraph specifically discusses the implications of the table. In addition, it would have been interesting to read more about the author's analysis of "Laverne & Shirley" 's popularity as a sitcom of female friendship, especially given that it took a few years for network TV to develop similar shows like "Cagney & Lacey" and "Kate & Allie." Finally, the chapter on "The Cosby Show" is the briefest chapter in the book, despite (or perhaps because of) the fact that this program has been among the most analyzed by scholars, right up there with "Dallas" and "Star Trek." In fairness, it may be difficult to add much new to the Cosby mix.

Staiger ends the book by wondering if the blockbuster TV program is an extinct phenomenon, given the ratings erosion caused by VCRs, remote controls, and cable and competing mini-networks like WB and UPN. And yet in this post-network era we find a show like "Survivor." What may counteract Staiger's death sentence is the increased power of the mega-media conglomerate publicity machine to tout such ratings busters. CBS and Viacom certainly were not shy about promoting "Survivor" on various news, talk show, and cable outlets: CBS's "The Early Show" featured several "plugola" stories about "Survivor" every week. Television may in fact be moving from a Jed Clampett past to a Richard Hatch future, from the unexpected striking of black (and ratings) gold to the planned implementation of manipulative multi-player strategy.

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Headline Hollywood

A Century of Film Scandal

Edited by Adrienne L. McLean and David A. Cook. New Brunswick, N.J: Rutgers University Press, 2001. $52.00 cloth; $22.00 paper.

As its title implies, McLean and Cook's new collection of essays on media and scandal addresses a broad spectrum of scandals from the opening to the closing years of the twentieth century. The articles, despite their diversity, are linked by two unifying principles: first, that overt scandals often camouflage covertly scandalous social realities that cannot be directly acknowledged, and second, that the meanings of scandals are never straightforward; rather, as discursive constructions of a particular kind, they need to be subjected to rigorous analysis—as all the contributors do here, asking probing questions about how we know, what we know, and why it seems important to know it. James Lull and Stephen Hinerman's *Media Scandals: Morality and Desire in the Popular Culture Marketplace* is an important precursor to this collection—nearly all of the contributors make reference to it. Yet the essays in *Headline Hollywood* are marked by both scholarly originality and great critical depth, treating subjects that have up till now received little academic attention or investigating familiar subjects in thought-provoking new ways.

The first three essays in the collection focus upon well-known scandals in the era of silent cinema: the Thaw-White Case of 1906, in which Harry Thaw stood trial for the death of architect Stanford White, who had allegedly raped Thaw's wife, the chorus girl (and later Hollywood actress) Evelyn Nesbit Thaw; the Fatty Arbuckle charges in the death of starlet Virginia Rappe; and the death of film star Wallace Reid. All three essays thus focus on morality, scandalous death, and the leisure industries, raising a set of often interrelated questions regarding the way that early Hollywood sought to safeguard the image capital embodied in its workers and charting a trajectory of growing regulatory control by the industry.

Lee Grieveson's "The Thaw-White Scandal, *The Unwritten Law*, and the Scandal of Cinema" notes how the shape of the scandal in the popular press resembled early film melodrama formulas in which an innocent lower-class heroine is ruined by a male villain and then redeemed by a chivalric hero. With the film production in 1907 of *The Unwritten Law: A Thrilling Drama Based on the Thaw-White Case*, the news story and its cinematic underpinnings merged fully, and moreover, as Grieveson suggests, the film

"became a dense transfer point" (29) between the scandal and the emergence of a moral panic about the nature and function of cinema itself. When Thaw's attorney made the case that his client had been acting out of a condition he termed *dementia Americana*—a legitimate rage triggered by the desecration of a man's home—a powerful nexus of concerns with national identity, patriarchy, class, and the public sphere emerged. Meanwhile (and most interestingly), Evelyn Nesbit Thaw became "the first person to capitalize on a scandal to become a film star" (43). Although Grieveson provides a cogent account of the scandal and its import, he gives only passing attention to the issue of Nesbit's celebrity and the intriguing question of why/how it was positively informed by her role in the events of 1906-7.

In his essay "Fatty Arbuckle and the Black Sox," Sam Stoloff sketches the fascinating similarities between the 1919 World Series "fix" involving the Chicago White Sox and the career-ending notoriety of the 1921 Arbuckle case. Stoloff makes productive use of Richard Hofstadter's famous formulation of "The Paranoid Style in American Politics" to show how both postwar scandals, in giving "symbolic power and focus to ongoing social and economic conflict" (53), encoded a Manichean world view that shaped them into evidence of a crisis in masculinity facilitated by "Jewish control" in the baseball and film industries and other "multiform anxieties about social decay" (61). By equating their focus on "failures" of national manhood, Stoloff shows how these scandals also crystallized concerns over labor and legitimized labor control activities disguised as necessary "housekeeping measures" through the formation of the Baseball Commissioner's Office and the Hays Office respectively.

Mark Lynn Anderson's "Shooting Star" provides an insightful analysis of the uses of Wallace Reid for a film industry concerned with burnishing its image in the wake of events such as the Arbuckle case and more adept at managing scandal than before. Reid's death, most likely related to his use of heroin, was managed by Hollywood in such a way that "although images of wreckage, waste and ruined efficiency continued to dominate the media coverage of Reid's addiction, these negative qualities of his stardom were effectively detached from the demands of industrial film production and transferred to the excesses of private life and consumption" (97).

Nancy Cook's "The Scandal of Race" considers the case of Chief Buffalo Child Long Lance, star of Paramount's *The Silent Enemy* (1930) a film which purported to document the lives of Ojibwa Indians in Canada. Scandal arose in regard to the star, a popular figure in New York society circles, when it was revealed that he was not, as he claimed, a chief from a branch tribe of the Blackfoot, but rather a man of mixed racial background designated "black" in turn-of-the-century North Carolina. Cook's discussion of his fraudulent ethnic credentials raises questions about sanctioned and unsanctioned modes of passing in Hollywood and in the culture at large. It was perfectly appropriate for Long Lance to impersonate an Ojibwa in a staged documentary, yet it was highly inappropriate to have the elements of the invented biography that crafted his persona as an idealized Indian refuted—the revelation that Long Lance's ethnicity was not static was deemed scandalous for the way it proved racial boundaries unstable.

With "Ecstasy: Female Sexual, Social, and Cinematic Scandal," Lucy Fischer moves the volume into the classical period of Hollywood history. Her concern is with the lingering effects of Hedy Lamarr's participation in *Ecstasy*, the 1933 Czechoslovakian film whose sexual frankness and attribution to Lamarr of a desiring subjectivity ran the risk of dismantling the passive glamour used in the construction of Lamarr's star persona. Indeed, in many respects, Lamarr's later stardom would be anchored by her beautiful but often blank face in a process that threatened to be undermined by the scandalous exposure of her body in *Ecstasy*. Fischer's essay, while it sets up many insightful lines of analysis, suffers from a hasty conclusion that fails to fully revisit the issue of scandal that is its central concern.

In "As Red as a Burlesque Queen's Garters," Cynthia Baron observes that "scandalous behavior can simply be behavior that is open to attack by members of an opposing ideological position" (144-45). That point is amply demonstrated in her discussion of the 1948 persecution of the Hollywood theater company known as the Actors' Lab by the California State Fact-Finding Committee on Un-American Activities (the Tenney Committee). Baron forcefully demonstrates that the Committee was able to ascribe a scandalous status to the Actors' Lab, deeming it a "communist front," by mobilizing a republican national vision to discredit the participatory citizenship that structured the Lab's activities. The success of this strategy, Baron contends, is evident in the marginalization of the Actor's Lab in theater and film histories of anti-Communist persecution, which tend to focus on the Group Theatre and the Actors Studio in New York, while taking little note of the important events of 1948 that she details.

Adrienne McLean's "The Cinderella Princess and the Instrument of Evil" is a measured reconsideration of the standard account that the Rita Hayworth and Ingrid Bergman infidelity scandals of 1949-50 produced two opposite outcomes related to the contrasting star personae of Hayworth and Bergman. McLean demonstrates that it is an oversimplification to say that Hayworth's career was energized by the scandal because she played loose women in her screen roles while Bergman was castigated because of her pre-scandal image of saintliness. Numerous factors influenced public discourse on the scandals both in the long and short term, including the willingness of spouses to grant divorces to each of the stars, debates over the moral status of *Stromboli* (1950), and Hayworth's recuperation into the Cinderella role through her marriage to Prince Aly Khan.

Many of the McLean's concerns are extended in Erik Hedling's "European Echoes of Hollywood Scandal." He shows that established American scandals of various kinds do not transfer their meanings wholesale and are often "recast and reframed in a different cultural context" (191). When Bergman and Rossellini arrived in Sweden in 1955 to stage a production of the oratorio *Joan of Arc at the Stake*, they presented an opportunity for the press to use Bergman

as a locus for ongoing debates about the social and aesthetic status of cinema and its relationship to other "higher" art forms, as well as the status of an emigrant "native daughter" cast elsewhere as a "fallen woman." In considering the ways that scandal can be culturally transferred and reinterpreted to serve local interests, Hedling makes a compelling case; however, in foregrounding as source material the newspapers and prominent cultural journals that largely attacked Bergman while noting only briefly the women's weeklies that celebrated the star, he runs the risk of replicating the same marginalizing strategies he means to critique.

In "Systematizing Scandal," Mary Desjardins turns attention to the scandal magazines of the 1950s and their strategies for systematizing the production of scandalous discourse about Hollywood film stars. Such magazines came to prominence in the 1950s in part because, as studio power waned in the wake of the Paramount Decree, they could "sustain plausible fictions about stars at a time when it was no longer clear that the official voices of Hollywood could do so" (208). They could often insulate themselves from legal action through canny use of tipsters, composite facts, and state-of-the-art surveillance methods, yet those very practices also made them an unavoidable "Other" in 1950s California, where the state itself practiced similar strategies and was eager to compensate for this through a vigorous display of concern—the prosecution of the scandal sheets—for its citizens' privacy rights.

In a star study of Jane Fonda entitled "Barbarella Goes Radical," Susan McLeland delineates several phases of the star's celebrity in the 1960s and 1970s to better sketch the emergent contrasts between her early sex-kitten image that largely generated "a mutely compliant body" (233) and her later political radicalism. This shocking transformation registered as a crisis of voice (her radio broadcasts into North Vietnam gained their subversive force because they featured a Fonda who was scandalously disembodied). McLeland asserts that once her political radicalism had subsided, Fonda's films tended to tie the intellectual or moral awakening of her characters to sexual transformation in such a way that her subversive voice was re-contained. This reintegration process would then culminate with Fonda's reconciliation with her father and marriage to media magnate Ted Turner in the 1980s, and her re-production as a body through her workout videos.

Peter Lehman and William Luhr's contribution, "What Business Does a Critic Have Asking if Blake Edwards Is Gay?," expands the authors' work on Edwards to track the implications of the director's rumored homosexuality for a critical engagement with his films. They provide an interesting exploration of how some viewers may insulate themselves from the films' critical exploration of gender norms by asserting that this material emanates first and foremost from a gay director, and conclude that were it to be established that Edwards is gay (though he says he is not), the critiques of white heterosexual male authority in his films would ring differently, " shift[ing] from that of a brutally honest heterosexual acknowledging failures, fears and doubts to that of a closet homosexual or bisexual hiding both within the films and his public persona the reality of his sexuality" (268).

The final essay in the collection, "Hollywood Goes to Washington," by James Castonguay, focuses upon the 1997 film *Wag the Dog* and its relationship to what might be deemed the scandalous presidential "texts" of Bill Clinton. Much as Juliet Flower MacCannell has powerfully suggested that "In the articles for impeachment for Clinton, *Nixon*'s short-circuited impeachment was being replayed as fantasy—and as farce,"[1] Castonguay shows how the feminized masculinity embodied by Clinton motivated a sexual scandal that was in many ways geared toward the correction of a transgressive presidential masculinity and the restoration of more traditionally authoritative interests. In a discussion of the uncanny resemblances between Monicagate, the 1998 and 1999 air strikes against Iraq, Sudan, and Yugoslavia, and the film and the signifying functions its title came to perform, Castonguay argues that contemporary political and media scandals operate hypertextually. Thus *Wag the Dog* presented itself as a timely and trenchant critique of such developments even while it was itself implicated in the hypercommodified forms of global scandal so prevalent in postmodern media culture.

This very engaging book illuminates in a variety of ways the fact that what scandalizes in one era versus another has often to do with the ability of a scandal to pull into focus resonant and timely cultural, moral, and ideological dilemmas. Its breadth and scope make it a useful source for scholars of silent, classical, and postclassical film history.

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Note

1. Juliet Flower MacCannell, "Politics in the Age of Sex: Clinton, Leadership, Love," *Cultural Critique* 46 (Fall 2000), 251.

Hollywood v. Hard Core

How the Struggle over Censorship Saved the Modern Film Industry

By Jon Lewis. New York: New York University Press, 2001. $26.95.

Hollywood history "is never dull." But some histories read better than others. Jon Lewis wanted to structure this book less "less like an academic history" and more like a novel (9). And the fact that he does not deal with his subject chronologically, that he traces parallel paths that do not clearly meet until the end, does give the book a unique, a "novel" structure. But it does not read like a novel. Maybe it lacks colorful characters. We recognize the names—Will Hays, Joseph Breen, Eric Johnston, Kirk Kerkorian, Jack Valenti—but they are not dealt with on a human level, nor should they be for

what Lewis intends. A novel would tell their stories, but *Hollywood v. Hard Core* is about the facts behind their stories, and it therefore sometimes reads more like casebook for obscenity and corporate lawyers than a tinsel-town saga. That's why moments of personal reaction are surprising in an otherwise factual text, as when Lewis inserts that *Zabriskie Point* is "dated and pretentious and gorgeous" (186), "*Mom and Dad* is an awful film" (204), "*Last Tango* is a ponderous and pretentious film" (226), or, in a footnote justifying a statement about the academy's belated recognition of the cultural significance of porn: "As an academic I think I'm in as good a position as anyone to make this point" (355).

Originally, the book was to be a simple history of the 1968 MPAA rating system, but Lewis soon found himself writing an "expansive political, legal, and social history of American cinema," an apt description of his project (9). Complex, fascinating, and carefully researched (the footnotes alone run 42 pages), this is a thorough and detailed story of the "dirty business" behind the production and exhibition of motion pictures that draws intelligently on previous work in this area such as Richard S. Randall's *Censorship of the Movies* (1968), Gerald Gardner's *The Censorship Papers* (1987), Linda Williams' *Hard Core* (1989), Gregory Black's *Hollywood Censored* (1994), Frank Miller's *Censored Hollywood* (1994), and Eric Schaefer's *Bold! Daring! Shocking! True!* (1999). But Lewis has done extensive original and archival research on his own that puts these previous books on the subject of censorship in a different context. His work also raises some tantalizing areas for further research, as all good books should, especially the complex interaction between American politics and the Hollywood rating system. His suggestive remarks about the connection between the Civil Rights struggle and some of the censorship decisions made by the Supreme Court beg to be explored in future work.

The title, *Hollywood v. Hard Core*, is catchy, but misleading. It suggests that the book's subject is pornography; it is not. Lewis's thesis is simple: "The political and social utility of film censorship is altogether secondary to its economic function" (6). He argues convincingly that from the very beginning of movies, box-office needs rather than morality dictated the history of film regulation. Censorship has been effective over the years not because of morality, nor because it is even legally binding—he demonstrates in case after case how it is not—but because it will help the movie industry make money. Art is essentially irrelevant in what is, after all, a business. If censorship indeed saved the modern film industry, its efficacy has everything to do with economics, and little to do with patriotism, idealism, or morality.

Lewis states this bluntly in his first chapter, "How the Blacklist Saved Hollywood" (a version of which was published in the Winter 2000 issue of *Cinema Journal*): "The Hollywood Ten were sacrificed because they were bad for business" (39). The studios cooperated with the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) because it helped them manage their postwar labor problems and cut expenses and payrolls. The blacklist also encouraged the studios to develop a new way of doing business, following a corporate model of diversification into other areas such as the new and rapidly growing television market, books, magazines, toys, and theme parks, and laying the foundation for the multifaceted international conglomerates that make up Hollywood today. Indeed, as Lewis writes in his second chapter, "Today, so much money can be made in such a variety of markets, it is hard to imagine that any film ever loses money" (76).

Much of this chapter repeats familiar history in a detailed and extensive discussion of the Paramount Decree of 1948. But the breakup of the vertical integration also resulted in the weakening of the studios' control over the content of films as well as the operation of the theaters that showed them. Consequently, Lewis suggests, after 1948 there was a growth in sexually explicit, independently produced films, which only further weakened the studios' economic position of power and forced them to broaden their economic base.

Throughout this book—not chronologically, but along parallel paths—Lewis carefully traces the history of censorship up to what he calls a "watershed moment," the controversy around Roberto Rossellini's *The Miracle* in the *Burstyn v. Wilson* case in 1952 (102). This decision and others led to the voiding of state censorship laws, the disbanding of a number of state censorship boards, and consequently a resurgence of soft- and hard-core films. In the context of these changing times, the studios turned to their parent organization, the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) for guidelines on how to operate. (Thankfully, Lewis begins his book with a guide to the many acronyms sprinkled liberally throughout the text.)

The 1934 Production Code was still in effect in 1956. Rewriting the Code—the original subject of this book—had little to do with free speech or anti-censorship sentiments. It was, as Lewis reiterates, all about money, market trends, what would be best for business. The new "rating system," as opposed to a "code" or "censorship" document, was about targeting different audiences for different films rather than having one system that applied to all films. This way, studios could put an "R" rating on films for a mainly adult audience and an "X" rating on films not appropriate for young people under any circumstances. However, the "X" rating, he argues, had a more important economic purpose: it was used to marginalize independent, experimental, underground, and even "foreign art films." In this sense, CARA (the Code and Rating Administration) was in fact functioning much like the old PCA, as a censor.

Lewis explains why the rating system instituted in 1968 changed the look and the sound of movies. Although in many ways it functions as a censoring device like the earlier codes—he discusses Stanley Kubrick's *Eyes Wide Shut* in this connection in his last chapter—its strength is that it enabled the production of mature-themed films, or "soft core." Giving American directors the freedom to deal with "adult themes," to make "good" movies, got people back into the theaters in the 1970s to view studio releases. Francis Ford Coppola, Martin Scorsese, and Robert Altman were able to craft their intense and often personally felt films, from *The Godfather* in 1972 (whose phenomenal success made these

auteur films attractive to the studios) to Altman's *Nashville* (1975) and Scorsese's *Taxi Driver* (1976).

Along with these, there was also a string of successful X-rated exploitation films, including *I Am Curious Yellow* (1969), *Deep Throat (*1972), and much of the work of independents such as Russ Meyer, John Waters, and Wes Craven. Lewis's fifth chapter, from which the book takes its title, seems to argue that the "auteur renaissance" of the 1970s existed to combat the success of these kinds of films. He writes that the main impetus behind the studios' embrace of auteurism at this time was their "desperation to combat America's befuddling affection for hard core" (195).

But was that affection so befuddling, and was it so widespread? A film like *Deep Throat* may have been all the rage in New York, but it was not sweeping Middle America or the Bible Belt. Yes, to get people back in the theaters the studios no doubt realized that they needed to make "good movies," but these so-called good movies may have been less a response to the popularity of porn and more a response to the popularity of good movies from abroad. What Lewis does not deal with, although it is treated in his earlier *Whom God Wishes to Destroy . . .* (1995) and his edited volume, *The New American Cinema* (1998), is the impact of international auteurism on the kinds of films these young American filmmakers wanted to create.

The auteur renaissance was not only the first film-school-educated generation, it was also a generation that grew up watching the new films coming out of postwar Europe and Asia. The work of Federico Fellini, Ingmar Bergman, François Truffaut, Satyajit Ray, Jean-Luc Godard, and others like them reshaped the way young people thought about movies and gave them new models. Lewis rightly points out that the success of these new non-Hollywood products "at least partly explains the studio's embrace of auteurism in the early 1970s" (145). But it may have been more than "partly."

According to Lewis, it was Richard Nixon who engineered the end of porn. In giving the history of obscenity laws, Lewis's penultimate chapter, "Movies and the First Amendment," initially seems to be a digression. But he warns us in the introduction that the book will take many trails which will eventually merge, and they do. Famous literary cases of censorship establish the legal precedent that censorship laws are not the same for literature as for film. This chapter gives a lengthy legal summary of a number of obscenity cases, culminating with several decisions by the so-called Nixon Court after the 1968 election. With four Nixon-appointed justices, the Supreme Court basically outlawed the exhibition of hard core by the end of 1973, thereby returning to the MPAA exclusive access to the theatrical marketplace in all but a few selected urban areas. In so doing, Lewis concludes, Nixon and his Supreme Court "inadvertently saved Hollywood" (252).

During the course of this book, Hollywood is rescued three times: by the blacklist, by the auteur renaissance, and by the Nixon Court. Inevitably, Lewis must conclude that Jack Valenti and his rating system have been very successful. From the Paramount Decree and the Hollywood blacklist to the kinds of censorship laws that impacted a film such as *The Last Temptation of Christ*, studios have recognized that to be profitable they have to be diversified, to be able to look for payoffs in a number of different kinds of markets, both here and abroad.

Censorship takes many forms. The story of the production of *Zabriskie Point* (1970) is a chilling reminder that making political films in America can be very risky indeed. Lewis shows us how the politics of studio films today are carefully regulated more for economic reasons than for their sexual content. Individual moguls like Ted Turner are able to prevent the release of films they don't like, such as David Cronenberg's *Crash* (1996), Anjelica Huston's *Bastard out of Carolina*, and *Strange Justice*, based on a pro-Anita Hill book. The Nixon/Reagan/Bush legacy has left us with a successful rating system for the business of making movies, but a terrifyingly restrictive milieu for the creative vision that inspires a movie's content. Although Jon Lewis's book does not address the new Bush era, much of what he has to say is suggestive of what the first decade of the new millennium might have in store for us if the patterns of the past repeat themselves. This is sobering reading.

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Identifying Hollywood's Audiences

Cultural Identity and the Movies

Edited by Melvyn Stokes and Richard Maltby. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press/BFI, 1999. $65.00 cloth; $27.95 paper.

This collection of 11 new essays is the second of three planned volumes to be published by the British Film Institute based on research first presented at the 1998 Commonwealth Fund Conference. (I should acknowledge here that I participated in this conference and have an essay in the first collection, *American Movie Audiences: From the Turn of the Century to the Early Sound Era*). The anthology is divided into two parts, with the first half covering various conceptualizations, analyses, and profiles of the audiences for the movies during the sound film era, while the second half ethnographically explores what groups of individual viewers say about and do with their moviegoing experiences. The full title of this anthology, then, is appropriate in that it yokes together two quite distinct research projects that have become central for film studies: examining (and sometimes reclaiming) Hollywood's audiences, and speculating about how identity is formed at and through the movies. The two projects by and large remain distinct in this book, though Richard Maltby does provide an exemplary introduction that maps out the relations among the individual essays.

However, what all the contributions to the volume do share is the assumption that it is a misnomer to speak of Hollywood's "audience." It's *audiences* that are out there, in the seats, in the cultural discourse, in the gaze of film

historians and cultural commentators. Hollywood's audiences have always been in the process of change, expanding or shrinking in number and shifting in demographic composition. They are, in addition, varied and diverse over time and place. What's required, as these essays so well demonstrate, is that we think about moviegoers and moviegoing discursively and historically. Indeed, a book like this one should make us wonder whether it is ever appropriate to speak of audience in the singular. (It is, I think. For instance, the people present for a particular public screening constitute an audience, no matter how differently each viewer may respond to the film.)

Together, the first six essays in *Identifying Hollywood's Audiences* provide a chronologically arranged account of how movie audiences have been identified and understood by the industry itself as well as by assorted market researchers and social scientists since the late 1920s. Melvyn Stokes, for example, mines social-scientific projects such as Alice Miller Mitchell's *Children and Movies* (1929), Harold Blumer's *Movies and Conduct* (1933), and Robert and Helen Merrell Lynd's *Middletown* (1929) for the data with which to "construct a history of female spectatorship" (42). Reclaimed and read correctly, this material can, Stokes argues, provide some sense both of women's actual "movie-going practices and preferences" (48) and of the influence of the movies in the lives of female spectators. Susan Ohmer, in contrast, does not attempt to locate real moviegoers in the public opinion polls conducted by George Gallup for the Audience Research Institute in the 1940s; she is more concerned with Gallup's methodology and with the uses that studios like RKO made of his data, which "functioned primarily as a tool for managerial control" (74). The most relevant data for thinking about the post-1960 period, according to Peter Kramer, are demographics and box-office receipts. Kramer compares "basic demographic facts" about the audience (104) with box-office totals for "male-oriented" and "female-oriented" releases, and concludes that contemporary Hollywood has mistargeted its audience and thus marginalized female moviegoers.

Richard Maltby takes a different tack, focusing neither on the bodies in the seats nor on some version of sociological research, but rather on the industry's own "discursive construction" of the Hollywood audience during the Depression, as evidenced most directly in the trade press. In their prognostications for individual films, how did trade reviewers imagine likely audiences? Even as Hollywood publicly promoted the myth of the all-encompassing, democratized, undifferentiated (and middle-class) movie audience, movies were distributed and exhibited—and therefore produced—according to certain shifting "typologies of audience groupings" (23): urban versus rural, sophisticated versus "hick," as well as distinctions based on gender and age. In effect, Maltby convincingly demonstrates that "the Classical Hollywood industry was engaged in a periodic process of reinventing and reconfiguring its audience" (38). To examine this complex process requires attention to both production trends and exhibition practices, but as Maltby notes, it is the history of distribution that particularly needs to be researched, if and when primary documents become available.

While Maltby's essay opens the most room for further forays into the study of Classical Hollywood's audiences, Robert Allen's look at the contemporary situation in the United States offers the most ambitious and comprehensive argument in this volume. Allen proposes that the new "family film," marketed across platforms and through different exhibition windows leading ultimately to sell-through video, signals nothing less than the "death of Hollywood cinema" (110) as we have known it. Large-scale U.S. population shifts—along with the consumer embrace of the VCR—have reconfigured the audience for Hollywood product, but for Allen this audience can now only be identified as "a set of markets across which a given film and its related, but by no means identical, versions, characters and licensed paraphernalia are exploited" (127).

If Allen is correct, have we already seen the end of Hollywood audiences, which have been rendered archaic or irrelevant in an age when the entertainment industry turns out postmodern "family" product designed for a maximum number of baby boom/echo boom markets? The five essays that constitute the second half of *Identifying Hollywood's Audiences* could almost be seen as challenging Allen's claim, in that they focus, in different ways, on what real (British) audiences do with and say about their (Hollywood) moviegoing experiences. Drawing on familiar work by Jackie Stacey, Henry Jenkins, Janice Radway, and British cultural studies, these essays, as might be expected, consistently challenge both monolithic theorizations of spectatorship and also utopian claims for the possibility of a resisting (and therefore empowered) viewer. Brigid Cherry's study of female viewers of horror movies, Annette Hill's research involving focus groups of viewers who regularly watch "violent" films, and Annette Kuhn's speculations about "enduring fandom" all offer a more nuanced understanding of audience that goes hand-in-hand with a more localized and a more intensive case study approach. (Kuhn's beautifully written piece on lifetime fans of Nelson Eddy is exemplary in this regard.) The working premise of all these essays makes sense: to look at specific audiences (defined by gender, age, class, or some combination thereof) is to better appreciate what certain groups of people or certain categories of viewers do with the movies, or—more accurately—what they *say* they do with the movies, how they talk about their experience with a movie or a genre or a star over the short term and over the long haul. The knotty questions that these scholars indirectly or directly pose are well worth restating: How do we define and locate real audiences? How do we access and read their responses? Which responses matter most and which can be made available through interviews or written accounts: the immediate experience? The formative effects on subjectivity? The more extended relationship with a genre or a star? How do we contextualize these responses or analyze them in relation to the film and video texts in question? In fact, the methodological or meta-critical issues at stake in such ethnographic research sometimes seem more interesting than any actual "results," which can tend to be tentative or obvious or straining for significance.

Identifying Hollywood's Audiences does offer results, adding to what we know about movie audiences and the formation of cultural identities. The important contributions by Maltby, Allen, and Kuhn alone make this a volume worth considering. Read collectively, the essays raise significant questions about historical and ethnographic methods and resources—important topics, since there is no question but that audiences are here to stay in film studies.

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Ladies and Gentlemen, Boys and Girls

Gender in Film at the End of the Twentieth Century

Edited by Murray Pomerance. Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 2001. $57.50 cloth; $18.95 paper.

An engaging collection of wide-ranging essays, *Ladies and Gentlemen, Boys and Girls* is a virtual geography of gender in films from the closing decades of the twentieth century. While the anthology's title seems to point, in part, toward issues of audience address—how films speak to groups defined both by age and by gender—this collection is still more centrally concerned with illuminating the cinematic spaces that define and delimit male and female fields of opportunity and action in an age of increased globalization, commodification of experience, and hybridizing of film genres. From Steven Woodward's "No Safe Place: Gender and Space in Polanski's Recent Films" to David Desser's "Jews in Space: The 'Ordeal of Masculinity' in Contemporary American Film and Television," and from Hamid Naficy's analysis of spatialized regulatory dynamics in Iranian cinema to Janice Welsch's "'Let's Keep Goin'!: On the Road with Louise and Thelma," this collection offers timely and provocative reflections on the topographies of possibility and the persistent tensions between progressive and regressive visions of the territories cinema allocates to specific gendered behaviors.

The anthology is usefully divided into three parts. The first considers examples created outside of North America, such as Hong Kong action movies. (These are the subject of a fascinating chapter by Lenuta Giukin, whose work also illuminates the subsequently released *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* [2000]). The second part focuses primarily though not exclusively on North American cinema and, like the first, reflects on "gender identity as a known and knowable organized entity, a status, an aspect of the social world" (14). Chapters include Gaylyn Studlar's excellent analysis of Tom Cruise's (pre-*Magnolia*) performances of masculinity and Barry Grant's fine readings of new genre films. The third part treats films peopled by gender extremities—by "paragons and pariahs"—such as the "hipsters and nerds" of Krin Gabbard's smart and amusing "Black Jazz Artists and Their White Shadows" and the characters explored in Pomerance's own nuanced reading of Gus Van Sant's remake of *Psycho*.

Along with these three groupings there is also a sense in which the book comes full circle. The famous *Psycho* hotel, motel, and shower scenes that Pomerance examines in the book's final essay point back toward the Paris hotel and shower scene of Polanski's *Frantic*, discussed in Woodward's opening essay. Yet this circling back also throws a missed opportunity into relief. As insightful as Woodward's analysis is, it overlooks defining details in Polanski's depiction of Sondra (Betty Buckley), a middle-aged woman who has returned with her husband (Harrison Ford) to the site of their Paris honeymoon. Possessed of all the respectability that Marion Crane longs for, the post-shower Sondra nonetheless ends up kidnapped and with a knife at her throat due to a mix-up in the luggage, one she has teasingly blamed on her husband. Her accusation that he deliberately confused suitcases in order to have an excuse to send her shopping is a telling reflection on gender and consumerist dynamics. As for Sondra's own desire, it is most evocatively framed in a classic shot of her gazing raptly out the hotel room window at the Opéra, while her husband nuzzles her, eyes closed, asleep to the possibilities she sees. Such details beg for deeper analysis than Woodward's essay offers.

Despite this criticism, the work in this collection is generally inspired and inspiring. Of the many significant insights that emerge, two merit special emphasis. First, Pomerance recognizes in his introduction that not only is gender an obligatory performance in which, as Judith Butler maintains, *all* of us are constrained to be male and female impersonators, but further that "performative gender is an essentially consumerist notion, a form of identification and acquisition through the agency of packaging" (3-4)—an observation that ties his conceptual framework to the work of Jeremy Rifkin and his notion of hypercapitalism. If Pomerance seems to miss the deconstructive play that gives Butler's theory of gender its distinct flavor, both he and his contributors are nonetheless keenly aware of recent popular films' tendency to punish deviations from the culture's performative constraints, and this is the second insight that I wish to stress. As Pomerance observes, films released at the end of the twentieth century often evince a gap between a surface that implies gender liberation and the rigid substrata of pressures that are conservative, unequal, and disenfranchising, "perhaps even more brutal now than ever because painted as something else" (7). (In ways that typify the development of gender studies, this insight extends and complicates pioneering feminist film scholar Molly Haskell's "reverence to rape" idea.) Rebecca Bell-Metereau's analysis of the "gender assumptions of capitalism and the rituals of consumption" in *As Good as It Gets* ("Eating and Drinking, Men and Women" [97]) is illustrative in this context.

Inevitably, there are some innovative end-of-the-century films, significant for their treatment of gender, that are not mentioned in this book—and some that most likely could not have been, given the time constraints of publishing anthologies. *Run Lola Run* (1998), *Boys Don't Cry* (1999), and *Being John Malkovich* (1999) are among them. However, along with early twenty-first century films such as *Chopper*, *Shrek*, and *Amores Perros*, these can be more productively

studied and understood against the backdrop of the interpretive models and innovative perspectives developed in Pomerance's lively and extremely rewarding anthology.

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Movie Wars

How Hollywood and the Media Conspire to Limit What Films We Can See

By Jonathan Rosenbaum. Chicago: A Cappella Books, 2000. $24.00.

Movie Wars is the book Jonathan Rosenbaum, currently the film critic for the *Chicago Reader*, was born to write. It consolidates a lifetime of fervent, edgy cinephilia that began with a young fascination born of easy access to family-owned movie theatres in Florence, Alabama, and has ripened into a mature passion. It is the angry book of a disappointed lover, an exposé that does not restrict itself to the sins of media distributors and producers, as the title suggests. In a series of essays in which a judicious self-restraint only occasionally gives way to a shrill Jeremiad about the state of movies today, Rosenbaum not only probes clichés about the moviegoing public and lances boils of smug industry self-justification, but also takes to task—for myopia and complicity—the journalistic and academic critical establishments. Yet, for all its energetic attack, this is a highly positive wake-up call directed toward all who can make a difference in contemporary film culture: teachers, critics, scholars, and the creative and business partners in the film industry.

The book is not constructed around a sustained, linear thesis; the loosely woven collection of essays moves fitfully around Rosenbaum's vision of the woeful state of film culture today, sometimes making a glancing, oblique strike at distributors, journalists, and academics; sometimes going for a direct hit. In addition to those targets, the book's ten slim chapters also aim at (among other things) the critical discourse about *Small Soldiers*, the American Film Institute, American isolationism, multinational productions, film festivals, and those who humiliated and tormented Orson Welles under the old studio system. Although the reader is taken on a multitude of digressive paths, somehow each bend in the road leads back to the author's main point.

Rosenbaum's opening salvos establish the tone of the book. He is fed up with tired, patently ludicrous attempts to blame *the audience* for the state of mass-market film culture today, the riptide of movies that "alienate us from our possibilities." Looking at the generally awful results of revisions made on the basis of test marketing that reflect what the distributors think peeved the test audiences, Rosenbaum asks whether we really believe that the culture industry is only giving the public what it wants. Or is the reality that, because of intensely skewed distribution practices, the only film choices the public knows about amount to being permitted to "decide" to slake their thirst with either "liquid soap or shoe polish"? Pointing to a set of disingenuous industry contradictions, Rosenbaum asserts that "movie biz" truisms which prohibit a more inclusive policy about film production and film distribution (for example, that the public won't stand for either black-and-white movies or subtitles) are self-serving hypocrisies that should collapse in the light of Hollywood's own history of successes, such as *Schindler's List* (black-and-white film stock) and *Dances with Wolves* (subtitles).

Approaching the problem from another angle, Rosenbaum carefully details the tendency of film mavens with public platforms to perpetuate a complementary intellectual climate that virtually justifies the platitudes of the producers. He exposes the critic who makes a bad situation worse through disingenuous handwringing, accusing some of our most well-regarded critics of foolishly bemoaning the current paucity of worthy filmmakers as they look back to what they define as the good old days. Chapter One, "Is Cinema Really Dead?," points out what should be obvious to the chorus of doomsday singers whom Rosenbaum takes to task for their selective myopia, reminding us that the critics in the good old days had little good to say about the filmmakers now praised by the likes of David Denby, David Thomson, and Susan Sontag. Why then, asks Rosenbaum, do these critics, who should have learned from the mistakes of their predecessors, insist on mournfully comparing the once disdained Godard and Welles to what they see as the lacking current crop, instead of trying to ferret out the exciting, but overlooked, new developments in film today? Rosenbaum also points the finger at another group of critics who surrender to the demands of editors hostile to the publication of reviews of any but the most mainstream, blockbuster movies. Among a myriad of anecdotes about the refusal (or inability) of the critics to engage vital, current cinema, Rosenbaum tells us the following: "One of the most sophisticated American critics I know refused to see Bela Tarr's seven-hour *Satantango* at the Toronto Film Festival because he knew that if he really liked it he would feel frustrated about not being able to write about it," since his editor would not print anything about a film so far beyond the assumed interests of the audience. If some readers are wondering who Bela Tarr is, as I would have been before I read Rosenbaum's film criticism in the *Chicago Reader*, it would seem that Rosenbaum has made his point.

While most observers of the current movie scene are well aware of the difficulty that most Americans have locating a theater that shows even the most famous international films, let alone those of marginalized filmmakers, Rosenbaum has much to add to our perspective on why this is so. *Movie Wars* points to a muddled form of artistic and social isolationism in "the biz" and the way it is perpetuated by the man this book identifies as the Anti-Cinema, Harvey Weinstein—an interesting target for Rosenbaum because of his reputation as a major (and powerful) supporter of independent film and as the man who makes it possible for Americans to see foreign films. Rosenbaum has made it his task to dispel Weinstein's false reputation, and he makes a compelling case that Weinstein's shining image hides both an ugly compulsion to use his power to eviscerate the inde-

pendent films he acquires for distribution and an unfathomable tendency to leave half of the foreign films he acquires on his shelves.

Rosenbaum also takes on the filmic isolationism demonstrated by the American Film Institute, individual critics, and the American public alike. As might be expected, he reserves most of his rancor for the socially powerful promoters of American xenophobia as he makes the obvious arguments about the political rather than critical basis for the AFI "100 Best" lists, which are clearly designed to enhance commercial profits rather than to thoughtfully establish an American film canon, let alone an American openness toward the films of other cultures. He also makes less obvious arguments about the illusory nature of the xenophobic compulsion of Americans and American institutions toward what they perceive as American film, asking, "Does American cinema still exist?" Rosenbaum suggests that the capital that underwrites a film is an important consideration in determining its "nationality, " since much of the capital that supports what are considered American films comes from outside the United States. Not every reader will agree that capital determines the national provenance of a film, and many will also be somewhat dubious about Rosenbaum's suggestion that some films made by foreign directors are more honest and expressive about American society than some films made by American directors. However, the argument is productively provocative.

Making a very complex case that national cinema "expresses something of the soul of the nation that it comes from," Rosenbaum goes on to compare Paul Verhoeven's *Starship Troopers* (a Dutch director working in a commercial American venue) and George Lucas's *The Phantom Menace* (an American director working in a commercial American venue). Lucas, Rosenbaum points out, is less acute than Verhoeven in expressing "the soul of America," as Lucas drowns in his financial freedom to play with high-end digital effects while the relatively low-budget Verhoeven may be said to express more about America, albeit from an outsider's perspective. Which film is, then, more American? Is it American to lose one's way in expensive technology? Is it American to have insight into the culture? An additional irony is that Verhoeven's film has been marketed as an American film, despite its outsider's angle of vision, in order to support its chances for distribution. Rosenbaum's most telling evidence for the damage done by the conspiracy "to limit what films we see" is in his chapter on Orson Welles, an American filmmaker whose capacity to express the American soul was substantially impeded by Harvey Weinstein's studio system predecessors. This is not xenophobia but the obverse narrative, that of the tendency of American film culture to swallow its own too independent, assertive children.

Rosenbaum mounts a strong offensive against the cultural imperialism of Harvey Weinstein and his Miramax, the commercialism of the American Film Institute, and the collusion of journalists who write about film with the financial aspirations of producers, but finally he points the finger at himself and at all of us for our intellectual laziness and our cultural apathy. All journalists know that the line between the priorities of critics and the business interests of film producers has become so tenuous that it is threatening to disappear altogether. Privately, many critics will say that there are constraints imposed on what they write because they can be barred from preview screenings by angry distributors. Others will acknowledge that tasty perks and lavish junkets have an effect on filmic discourse. Rosenbaum is one of the few who insistently makes this public knowledge. What he has to say here amounts to plea that we stop averting our eyes from the corruption and intellectual dishonesty and from the damage it does to us culturally.

The message of *Movie Wars* is of the utmost importance, a tonic for the knowledgeable and an urgent wake-up call for the naïve, though what Rosenbaum is asking for in concrete terms is somewhat vague. Many, especially those critics trapped within the situation that he so fully outlines, will say that the espousal of greater distribution of international film production, increased critical attention in newpapers, journals, and magazines to independent and foreign features, and a rejection of the mythology of the viewing public as a stupid beast is like voicing approval for nutritious food. Many will be irritated that Rosenbaum assigns blame at the same time that he declines to identify a way to put a bell on this enormous, territorial, sabre-toothed cat. Others will point out that Rosenbaum has failed to note and appreciate the consequences for film culture of the many journals that do attend abundantly to both international and truly independent films. Nevertheless, *Movie Wars* is essential reading for anyone who cares about movies. It is rich with experience, knowledge, and an encouraging refusal to be silenced by the illusion that what is now reality will always define our limits.

Martha P. Nochimson is the author of *The Passion of David Lynch: Wild at Heart in Hollywood* (1997) and *Screen Couple Chemistry: The Power of 2* (2002).

The New Avengers

Feminism, Femininity and the Rape-Revenge Cycle

By Jacinda Read. New York: Manchester University Press, 2000. $74.95 cloth; $24.95 paper.

Jacinda Read's *The New Avengers: Feminism, Femininity and the Rape-Revenge Cycle* is part of the "Inside Popular Film" series which seeks, as its general editors proclaim in their description of the series, "to develop new ways of analyzing popular film" by providing "historically informed accounts . . . which present this area as altogether more complex than is commonly suggested by established film theorists." This is an admirable ambition, and the books in this series provide interesting and well-written texts suitable for use with students of film and media studies, as well as being of interest to general readers and specialists in the field.

Jacinda Read's book fits into the series well. Except for a few indecipherable sentences and exceedingly long paragraphs, it is generally a clearly written and interesting

account of popular female avenger films. Read's work does, however, have a number of problematic aspects. As she states in her introduction, her purpose is to understand the relationship between popular U.S. films and second-wave feminism. She therefore sets out to examine a group of contemporary films that she dubs, following Carol Clover in *Men, Women, and Chain Saws* (1992), the rape-revenge cycle. Here, I think, Read hits her first difficulty. The films that she examines cannot be so easily classified as a distinct cycle or even as primarily concerned with both rape and revenge. In defining rape-revenge films, Clover is careful to discuss films that clearly involve raped women who set out to take vengeance on their attackers. Her classic examples are low-budget films, such as *I Spit on Your Grave* (a.k.a. *Day of the Woman*, 1977) and *Ms. 45* (1981), and their big-budget descendants, such as *The Accused* (1988). It is Clover's contention that these low-budget films represent progressive representatives of the cycle, advocating women's direct involvement in fighting sexual abuse in response to an unresponsive legal system. The big-budget films, on the other hand, validate legal solutions to violence against women and thereby tend to advocate women's support of the status quo rather than radical action.

Read is not as careful to set out the boundaries of what she alternately defines as a film cycle and as a "narrative structure" identified as rape-revenge. The films she examines range from *Sleeping with the Enemy* (1991), which she sets up as her paradigmatic text, to *Batman Returns* (1992). In my opinion, these films cannot be definitely characterized as rape-revenge, and after reading Read's book, I am not entirely convinced they should be. In spite of her contentions that she is tracing a cross-generic cycle of rape-revenge films that extends through neo-noirs, Westerns, made-for-TV "trauma dramas," erotic thrillers, courtroom dramas, and sci-fi adventures, I am not so sure Read has identified anything more than the existence of the recurring popular cultural figure of the female avenger. For instance, I do not see *Sleeping with the Enemy* as primarily concerned either with rape or with revenge; it is about spousal abuse and one woman's desperate attempts to escape it. In the process of her escape attempt and in response to her abusive husband's relentless pursuit, the heroine becomes an unwilling avenger figure who is forced to destroy her monstrous husband before he can destroy her.

Although it is not completely clear that Read has identified a distinct film cycle, her examination of the films she has selected in terms of their relationship to feminist ideas is provocative. She contends quite rightly, I think, that it is through popular texts like the ones she examines that young women today get their understanding of feminist ideas, so it behooves academic feminists to try to understand these texts rather than merely rejecting them out of hand as instruments of a right-wing backlash against feminism. Read does present interesting close analyses of a number of films within different genres that all contain a female avenger, including *The Last Seduction* (1993), *The Quick and the Dead* (1995), *Hannie Caulder* (1971), *An Eye for an Eye* (1995), and *In My Daughter's Name* (1992). Curiously, the two films that fall most persuasively into the rape-revenge category, *Thelma and Louise* (1991) and *The Accused*, are never given close textual readings. Read presents instead a consideration of their critical reception, arguing that they stimulated a discussion of both the feminist issue of rape and the validity of feminism itself. Although her analysis here is interesting, it would have been useful to see how she analyzed these films' treatment of the rape-revenge issues themselves.

What I found most troubling about *The New Avengers* was the author's attitude to the work of other critics. Read seems to have taken the series editors' admonition to explore new approaches to popular film to mean that she should attack all previous critics of the medium. This she does with rather careless abandon. Her main object of attack is Carol Clover, who in Read's opinion can do nothing right: Clover misplaced the rape-revenge cycle under the category of horror, misconceived the cycle's development, and dehistoricized it by using cine-psychoanalytic theory to understand its female avenger figure. Since I admire Clover's work as a ground-breaking examination of gender in the contemporary horror genre, I am rather appalled by Read's blanket condemnation. Yet it is not just Clover who comes in for attack; Barbara Creed, Peter Lehman, Fredric Jameson, and Jane Feuer all get bashed, as does really just about all of feminist film theory. There is a mean-spiritedness in Read's criticisms of other critics that bothers me. They are said to "misinterpret," "misread," present "radically compromised" interpretations, and engage in "simplistic" analyses. I think it is particularly disturbing in a book aimed at students that they are given the impression that criticism means condemning other critics' work and criticizing it in rather insulting terms. Read's ideas are better served when she builds productively on the work of other critics, as she does with Will Wright's structuralist analysis of the Western, rather than trashing it.

What I do like about Read's book is her attempt to come to grips with the relationships among feminism, New Right conservatism, and contemporary film. As Read rightly points out, the 1990s are often considered a period of backlash against feminism when the New Right unleashed a vicious campaign that all but destroyed the viability of feminism in popular thinking and pushed it into academia, where it now uncomfortably resides in an all but dormant state. Read takes exception to this idea, arguing that what happened in 1990s Hollywood films was not entirely a backlash against feminism, but rather a "negotiation" of feminist ideas. What the films achieved was an unlikely blend of New Right rhetoric and feminist ideas, resulting in what Read considers a "synthetic compromise." A little feminism and a dash of conservatism form a cocktail blend that Read dubs the "postfeminist hybrid text." As she points out, feminist theorists have tended to see this negotiation as depoliticizing and mainstreaming feminist ideas so that they lose their oppositional edge and become compromised. Read sees this as inaccurate, and I think one must give some credence to her view. She argues that the mainstreaming of feminism in the 1990s actually allowed feminist ideas to gain widespread circulation among those who might otherwise have remained untouched by them, thereby attaining a certain degree of legitimacy.

The question is whether this legitimacy is worth the watering-down of feminism so that it can be amalgamated with conservative aims. Read seems to believe that as long as feminist ideas are joined to traditional notions of femininity (the dimensions of which Read fails to articulate fully), the result is progressive. If, however, as is the case in the maternal-avenger films that Read studies, feminist anti-rape rhetoric is used to support the New Right ideology of family values, it is regressive. I am not so sure. The whole idea of femininity needs to be problematized much more fully than Read does here in order to tease out the effects this interweaving of feminism and conservatism produces in the audiences of mainstream films. And these effects need to be examined in the context of audience response if we are ever to know how real viewers are responding to these films.

Read conceives of herself as utilizing a cultural studies approach rather than as employing traditional feminist film theory, which she, as a matter of course, condemns as monolithically anti-popular culture (need I add that she is in my opinion somewhat rash, and harsh, in this judgment?). She does not, however, extend her cultural studies approach to consider how real women (and men) interpret the images she analyzes. To propose that feminist theory has been wrong in seeing popular appropriations of feminist ideas as destructive, one needs to look at the effects of these appropriations. Read speculates about what these effects might be, based upon her close readings of these films. What seems to me to be needed in order to take these speculations a bit further are audience studies of how real women actually do respond to the expression of feminism in popular films and its amalgamation with conservative ideology. In spite of Read's failure to take this final necessary step, her book does make some provocative suggestions about the place of feminism in contemporary film, which is after all what the editors of this series charged her to do. Since the viewers are out there waiting to be interviewed, it seems time for cultural studies critics to stop suggesting and to start finding out what real viewers think they have gotten from pop-feminist female figures such as the female avengers Read describes.

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Perverse Spectators

The Practices of Film Reception

By Janet Staiger. New York: New York University Press, 2000. $44.00 cloth; $15.00 paper.

Perverse Spectators is an engaging book to read. Janet Staiger's intellectual concerns are central ones for film study and she describes her own positions clearly and fluently and develops arguments in a thoughtful and considered manner. An attractive intellectual modesty and openness can't disguise a wide ranging theoretical awareness and critical intelligence. Even when I wasn't persuaded by some arguments, I felt I was learning something and needed to explore my own position.

The book is a continuation of the work on film reception Staiger began with *Interpreting Films: Studies in the Historical Reception of American Cinema.* It brings together articles written over the past few years in which she has refined and expanded her ideas. Her central preoccupation, which gives the book its title, comes from the observation that people frequently respond to films in ways theorists can't properly account for. She believes that theoretical attempts to categorize people's responses have been inadequate. As a particularly relevant example, she discusses the characterization of audience response in terms of "preferred," "negotiated," or "oppositional" readings, pointing out that, since almost all readings are categorized as "negotiated," the distinctions have lost their analytical power. According to Staiger, too great an attachment to the text is one of the strongest reasons for the overall failure. She maintains the focus should be more on the context of audience response: "Context is more significant than textual features in explaining interpretative events" (30).

To articulate these concerns, the book is effectively divided into two. The first part consists of theoretical discussions of her position; the rest is principally made up of case studies in which she demonstrates the potential of her approach. There are analyses of responses to a range of films including *Blonde Venus*, *Clockwork Orange*, American underground films of the 1960s, *The Return of Martin Guerre*, *The Silence of the Lambs*, *Natural Born Killers*, and *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*.

For a variety of reasons, the study of audiences is now a key area for film scholarship. Janet Staiger's substantial commitment to this study is important because it helps to keep it at the heart of scholarly discussion. I am sympathetic to the directions she wants to take the discussion and was persuaded by some of her central points. She is surely right that an understanding of audience response has proved elusive for film theorists, though I'm not sure she's right to describe this response as perverse. And she makes a particularly convincing argument for grounding judgements of those responses, as progressive, resistant, conservative, etc., in particular historical contexts. Indeed, the way she always places responses to movies in particular contexts is one of the book's great strengths.

Another strength of the book is Staiger's willingness to acknowledge the problems posed by the study of audiences, and her efforts to think those problems through. Encouraged by her openness, I'd like to describe the issues where I was confused, or where I disagreed or was provoked to think more.

What are the best ways of studying how audiences respond to movies?

Staiger deals with the theoretical issues researchers face by developing two charts that offer a framework for exploring the relationship between audiences and movies. One of

those charts accounts for what is going on *inside* an individual as s/he responds to a movie. The other accounts for what is happening *outside*, both while watching the movie and afterwards. Here she makes the important point that audience response shouldn't be considered simply in terms of what happens in viewers' minds when they are watching a movie, but should also take into account their response to other people and to the overall environment as well as things that happen when they leave the theater.

The difficulty with these charts is that in a laudable attempt to be comprehensive they generate a large number of categories. If the charts are combined (they are described as complementary), there are 7 main categories and 15 subcategories, with each subcategory broken down under a number of headings. But a more manageable and economical framework is needed if a meaningful analysis is to take place. I also don't think that some of the main categories are commensurate: "Aesthetics" and "Discourse," for example, are categories of a different kind than "Compositional," "Verisimilitude," and "Narration."

These difficulties arise because of the attempt to highly formalize what is a complex and fuzzy process; it's probably a mistake to try to capture the interaction between an audience and a movie by way of a chart. Charts are very seductive for humanities academics—they seem to make knowledge precise and to add clarity to exposition—but the precision and clarity often limit their explanatory power.

Closely related to the theoretical problems audience researchers face are methodological ones. What kind of evidence will help our understanding of audience response? How can we collect it? How should we analyse it? Researchers have used a variety of evidence, which can be grouped in two areas: existing materials like reviews and fan letters; and materials generated by researchers through questionnaires and interviews. Janet Staiger uses different kinds of materials, but she favors the first area and makes consistent use of film reviews in her analyses—they fit easily into a research framework, are available in libraries, and their analysis is a familiar operation for anybody trained in methods of critical reading. And they are often the only evidence of responses. Some of the essays in *Perverse Spectators*, like the analysis of reviews of *The Silence of the Lambs*, demonstrate particularly well how they can be used. But I remain uneasy about their use as a central tool for understanding audience responses. Reviewers aren't necessarily representative of audiences; they are, first and foremost, journalists, and their professional position influences how they write. Some are close to academic discussion and write for particular, limited audiences. Others are hostile to theorizing and scholarship and do see themselves as representatives of the broad audience—whether they actually are is another question. It may well be that that reviewers help to shape audience responses, but that needs substantial investigation.

More work is needed to research the second area. The work on film audiences done by Martin Barker and Jackie Stacey has been productive, but so has Ien Ang's work on television audiences, Janice Radway's on popular fiction, and Joshua Gamson's on celebrity. Serious criticisms have been made of the assumptions and methods of this kind of work, and if they are to be properly countered, film scholars will need to better acquaint themselves with disciplines like sociology and anthropology, where many of the problems posed are familiar ones. The audience previews organized by film studios, research done by advertisers, and political public opinion polls would all reveal useful information as well.

Do audiences go to the movies for "meanings"?

Key terms for Janet Staiger in exploring the relationship between audiences and movies are "reading," "meaning," and "text." The essence of the relationship is presented as "reading texts for meanings." In presenting the relationship in this way, Staiger is in the mainstream of contemporary film scholarship, but within that framework she has made an important move by encouraging a broader interest in reading, one that is less preoccupied with the text. But, important as the move is, it doesn't alter the basic account of what happens when people see movies.

At the phenomenal level, people do things like laugh, cry, and express involvement, excitement, or boredom when they watch movies. After they have seen them, they discuss their experiences principally in terms of enjoyment or entertainment (or the lack of). None of this is adequately captured by the notion that they are reading texts for meanings, which is what makes Staiger's account less than satisfactory. It may be that at another level of consciousness, people are acting in ways for which this is an adequate account. If so, that level needs to be properly described and its relationship to the phenomenal level explained. One indication in *Perverse Spectators* of these problems is the way references to "affective" response are never properly anchored. Staiger is too sensitive an observer not to pay attention to this area of response, but her framework makes it difficult to find a firm place for it.

As Geoffrey Nowell Smith suggests in his illuminating article in *Reinventing Film Studies*, "meaning" has become a key term in academic film studies. The task of the film critic is to analyse the meanings of movies or, in Staiger's case, the meanings audiences produce from movies. Because of the political climate which surrounds contemporary film, the focus has been on the way the social and political world (with a special interest in questions of gender, ethnicity, and sexuality) is made meaningful by movies. The assumption is that movies play a key role in making the world meaningful for audiences, but I haven't come across any conclusive demonstration that they do play such a role, and the issue certainly needs much more attention than it has so far received.

Are moviegoers spectators?

The title of the book identifies moviegoers as spectators (even if they are also identified as misbehaving!). The same kind of identification is made generally in film theory. It's an important identification because an influential account of the cinema has come out of it—viewing as voyeurism. However, in the last 20 years or so, exhibitors have made major investments in upgrading their sound systems based on calculations about its importance for audiences. Developments in the use of music are especially interesting in the light of Staiger's concern with discussing response both inside and outside the

cinema. The increased use of pre-existing songs and the self-conscious composition of songs so they have a life outside of the movie are powerful ways of blurring the boundaries.

Given all this, can we go on thinking of filmgoers as spectators? Sound is no longer something which can be ignored or dismissed as of minor importance. The experience of filmgoers was never exclusively visual. It now surely has to be thought of as audiovisual. Theorizing about its nature should take this into account.

The issues I've raised in trying to describe my response to *Perverse Spectators* are substantial ones, yet in raising them I have a certain sense I'm being unfair to the book. At a number of points, Janet Staiger is careful to limit her aims. In her introduction, for example, she writes "Do not expect, however, any more profound master narrative than that real spectators are usually perverse spectators." I respect this kind of modesty and find it liberating. It invites dialogue. The most interesting work in the field, like Janet Wasko's work on film economics or Sarah Kozloff's work on film dialogue, has a similar modesty. In too much film and cultural theory, large ambitions produce writing that is opaque and suggestive of a monologue. However, there were occasions when I was reading *Perverse Spectators* that this modesty seemed inhibiting. I felt an issue ought to be pursued further, that Janet Staiger was more than capable of pursuing it further, and that I wanted to know what she thought. Maybe in her next book?

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Real Images

Soviet Cinema and the Thaw

By Josephine Woll. New York: I.B. Tauris, 2000. $24.50.

If the image of the "Thaw," a period which Josephine Woll dates from 1954 to 1967, conjures up a picture of a sudden release of creative energies that swept away the "ice" of the strict censorship and ideological restrictions that had stifled or destroyed the best talents of the Soviet Cinema (and the other arts) for so long, it is, at best, a partial truth. As Woll's informative acount makes very clear, this particular thaw, unlike Pudovkin's inexorably unfreezing river in *Mother*, proceeded by fits and starts, segments of thaw followed by (and sometimes co-existing with) episodes of freeze. The bureaucratic structures of the Soviet film industry remained firmly entrenched, and every genuine innovation was met with obstructive and delaying tactics or outright condemnation—often from critics and reviewers and even fellow filmmakers—before (with luck) the finished product could limp, sometimes still bruised and bleeding from the struggle, onto the screen. Those works that met with least difficulty tended not to attack or question head-on the myths and dogmas of the past, but to work obliquely round them and to put some much needed realism and genuine human feeling into the standard themes and formulas. Nevertheless, especially in what Woll sees as the highpoint of the Thaw era, the early 1960s, much work of genuine and lasting quality emerged, though it was not always greeted with approval at the time.

Stalin's death in 1953 did not immediately release the Soviet cinema from the moribund state into which it had lapsed in the postwar years. While a literary manuscript or musical score can be taken from the drawer, dusted off, and published or performed fairly quickly, films, even in the best of conditions, take months or years to bring to fruition. There were few shelved or banned films to rediscover, the main exception being Eisenstein's *Ivan the Terrible, Part II*, finally released in 1958, and it is curious that Woll nowhere mentions this film, which must surely have provided valuable ammunition for the anti-Stalin campaign that followed Nikita Khrushchev's seminal speech at the Twentieth Party Congress in 1956. Even when the film industry began to regain momentum at the end of the decade, each script still had to leap over as many as ten bureaucratic hurdles before being accepted, after which the completed film had to be approved in exactly the same manner.

While there was certainly an overall mood favoring reappraisal and reassessment of the dogmas of the Stalinist period, this did not mean that all criticism of the past (or indeed the present) was welcomed. Certain subjects, if not exactly taboo, remained very touchy. While victory over the Germans in the Great Patriotic War was no longer credited exclusively to Stalin's military genius, and it was now possible to hint that crucial strategic errors had been made, filmmakers had to be wary of presenting the war itself in an unpatriotic or "unheroic" manner that would belittle the achievements of the Soviet people and its fighting forces. Even cautious suggestions that life was not perfect in contemporary Soviet society, that poverty, misery, bureaucratic incompetence, and technological backwardness still existed, and that life down on the collective farm was often far from idyllic, were usually met with fierce and indignant rebuttals. Pernicious influences from abroad, especially in popular music and the arts, were stoutly resisted (Antonioni's work, for example, was a target of particular abuse). Evidence of dissatisfaction, boredom, and aimlessness among contemporary youth was treated as slander and rejected in favour of the time-honored paradigm by which the young listened respectfully to, and benefited from, the wisdom of their elders, so that society as a whole marched in optimistic harmony toward a radiant and soon to be realized future. Scripts, especially after the resignation of Khrushchev and the increasing restrictions imposed under Leonid Brezhnev, were routinely condemned for being "negative," "pessimistic," "untruthful," "gloomy," "erroneous," "subjective," and even—in a return to the vocabulary of the 1930s—"formalistic."

Woll's method in dealing with all this is largely—though not always consistently—chronological, and she focuses primarily on themes rather than style, a natural enough choice perhaps, though it ignores the possibility that style—as with Tarkovskii (I use Woll's own transliteration of Russian names) or Paradzhanov—can be as subversive as

subject matter. Oddly enough, almost at the very end of her book she even quotes the words of film director Lev Kulidzhanov on this topic, without seeming to acknowledge their significance:

> The aesthetic nature of film, its poetry, the particularities of its language, are not considered, which gives rise to the illusion that it's easy to judge films, anyone can do it. As a result, political, ideological or moral evaluations of a film are artificially separated from aesthetic analysis. (225)

Woll's own comments on style are limited largely to brief comments on Sergei Urusevskii's swirling camerawork for *The Cranes Are Flying*, Paradzhanov's "visual passion" in *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors*, and praise elsewhere for a film's "simplicity" or "straightforwardness."

The greater part of her book deals with many films that are likely to be little known to Western audiences; perhaps in an attempt to rehabilitate them, she often gives little more than perfunctory attention to those considered in the West as classics: Grigorii Chukhrai's *Ballad of a Soldier* (1959), Alexandr Askoldov's *The Commissar* (1967), and the films of Paradzhanov and Tarkovskii (whose *Andrei Rublev* is disposed of in under a page), for example—though Mikhail Kalatozov's *The Cranes Are Flying* (1957) is singled out for more extended discussion as "the first indisputable masterpiece of post-Stalinist cinema" (71). (Kalatozov's later film, *I Am Cuba*, which has belatedly achieved cult status in certain circles in North America, is curtly dismissed—with some justice—as "a wildly melodramatic exaltation of Castro's Cuba . . . that viewers ranked as among the dozen worst films of the year" (184).

The most detailed examination in the book is probably that given to Marlen Khutsiev's important *Ilich's Gate*, originally made in 1961 and fiercely attacked for its downbeat portrayal of the younger generation and its depiction of the contrast in Soviet life between the official ideology, which advertised a happy, contented, prosperous society, and the mundane reality of hypocrisy and compromise. After a debate in which Khrushchev himself intervened (on the side of the film's detractors), Khutsiev began a struggle lasting several years to reshape the film into a form that would be officially acceptable, finally emerging in 1965 with a much shortened and reedited version called *I Am Twenty*, by which time the film had lost much of its original bite and significance.

Khutsiev himself (*July Rain*, 1967), along with Eldar Riazanov (*Carnival Night*, 1957), Iulii Raizman (*And What If It's Love?*, 1962), Vasilii Shukshin (*Your Son and Brother*, 1965), the veteran Mikhail Romm, who emerged from years of official tub-thumping to direct two of the seminal films of the period—*Nine Days of a Year* (1962) and *Ordinary Fascism* (1965)—and the rather better-known (in the West at least) Kira Muratova (*Brief Encounters*, 1967), Elem Klimov (*Welcome*, 1964), Larisa Shepitko (*Wings*, 1966), and Andrei Mikhalkov-Konchalovskii (*The First Teacher*, 1965) all produced work of lasting quality during the period, but generally at the cost of incessant struggle, vituperative criticism, and personal agonies and frustration. It may perhaps even have come as a relief to some of them when the fashion shifted, especially under Brezhnev, to simply shelving films (*Andrei Rublev*) or banning them outright (*The Commissar*, Alexandr Alov and Vladimir Naumov's *A Nasty Tale* [1965], Iurii Ilenko's *A Spring for the Thirsty* [1965]), rather than tormenting their directors with endless demands for excisions, reediting, and reworking to make their work more optimistic, patriotic, truthful, and ideologically acceptable.

The Thaw, then, emerges not as an untroubled period of relative enlightenment after the darkness of the Stalin era, but as a time of constant conflict, debate, and controversy, during which a handful of filmmakers managed to snatch—an often partial—victory from the old guard and the reactionary forces ranged against them. Finally, and for most of the next 20 years, the victory went to their opponents: the two most talented figures, Tarkovskii and Paradzhanov, were effectively silenced, one in self-imposed exile, the other first in prison and then under constant harassment for each new film he made; and the careers of the newer generation of Muratova, Klimov, and others were, often irretrievably, blighted. The ice thawed briefly, but only to freeze again in the solid mud of stagnation.

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Treasures from American Film Archives

Fifty Preserved Films

National Film Preservation Foundation. San Francisco, CA, 2000. Four-disc DVD set, companion booklet, $99.99.

The advent of new technologies can serve as occasions for advances and retreats in the accessibility of earlier media. Television, as McLuhan noted, seemed haunted by cinema, and made the airing of movies one of its principal functions. The rapid proliferation of video culture created a greater shelf life for second-rate movies and produced, in combination with cable TV, a virtual afterlife of bad cinema, but the so-called CD revolution saw the disappearance of many important recordings in the transition from analog to digital sound. Each new medium must establish its relation to the archive, to the body of work that remains from previous technologies. The recent expansion of DVD technology carries with it similar possibilities for expanding the availability of recorded images and sounds, although, as with video and laserdisc technologies before it, DVD remains a promise yet to be fulfilled.

Treasures from American Film Archives: 50 Preserved Films, a new four-disc collection of rare films from archives across the United States, suggests a promising start for the new era of films on DVD. Supervised and distributed by the National Film Preservation Foundation (free to state libraries), *Treasures* brings together a collection of films from

18 archives from "Alaska to Virginia," and features 50 films from pre-Lumières-era cinemas of the late nineteenth century to the most recent work, completed in 1985. The total running times of *Treasures* approaches 11 hours. While some of the works—such as the Edison/Porter shorts, or D. W. Griffith's *Lonedale Operator* (1911)—may be more familiar to film historians than others in the collection—*Groucho Marx's Home Movies* (ca. 1933), and other amateur home and travelogue movies—all of the films assembled in *Treasures* are rare, and are now accessible, perhaps for the first time, to individual viewers.

Included in *Treasures* are important early films from the Edison Company, such as *Blacksmithing Scene* (1893), *The Gay Shoe Clerk* (1903), and *Three American Beauties* (1906); so-called Paper Print Copyright Deposits, rediscovered in the Library of Congress, *Demolishing and Building Up the Star Theatre* (1901), *Move On* (1903), and *Dog Factory* (1904); and from Edison's "Peepshow Kinetosocopes," precursors to the Lumières' "Cinématographe," *Luis Martinetti, Contortionist* (1894) and *Caicedo, King of the Slack Wire* (1894). Also in abundance are rare, fantastic, and sometimes classic silent narratives such as *The Thieving Hand* (1908), from the Vitagraph Company of America; *Princess Nicotine; or the Smoke Fairy* (1909), by J. Stuart Blackton; and *The Fall of the House of Usher* (1928), by James Sibley Watson, Jr.—of X-ray cinema fame—to name only a few. Animated treasures in the anthology include an early hand-drawn American cartoon by Harry S. Palmer, *I'm Insured* (1916); Tony Sarg's *The Original Movie* (1922), an animated satire about "the birth of moviemaking"; from the "Private Snafu" series, Charles (Chuck) M. Jones's political cartoon, *Spies* (1943), which features the writing of Theodore ["Dr."] Seuss Geisel and the voices of Mel Blanc; and American painter Dwinell Grant's abstract animation, *Composition 1 (Themis)* (1940).

Another feature of the *Treasures* selections is the inclusion of documentaries, newsreels, glimpses of life, and recorded performances, which include George Balanchine's choreography, presented as amateur footage of *La Valse* from 1951; and the piece that concludes the set, *From Marian Anderson: The Lincoln Memorial Concert* (1939), a portion of a restoration work-in-progress, currently underway at the UCLA Film and Television Archive. This "key event in U.S. Civil Rights history" features the controversial performance of African-American contralto Marian Anderson at the Lincoln Memorial after she was denied the use of Constitution Hall in Washington, D.C. by the Daughters of the American Revolution. As Simmon notes, this eight-minute excerpt represents the effort thus far to restore the full performance. Here and throughout the collection, one becomes aware of the profound value of preserving not only images but sounds—the voices, music, and ambient and industrial noises that serve as the soundtrack of the last century.

These lists of films represent only a sampling of the works collected in *Treasures*. Another strength of this collection is the booklet of program notes, with stills and sources for each film, which accompanies the set. Film scholar Scott Simmon has written insightful commentaries that relate pertinent historical and technical aspects of each work, as well as various points of interest. Similarly useful are the music notes, prepared by Martin Marks. The companion booklet makes clear the pedagogical and historical thrust of this collection, the belief that these works need to be contextualized and yet also understood as part of the complex intersection of history and technology in the era of cinema.

One of the most compelling aspects of this collection is the profound diversity not only of genres—narratives, comedies, home movies, recorded performances, scientific and technical films, documentaries, cartoons, and art films—but also of its subjects, which include historical images from war era views to the Negro Leagues; film technology from trick movies to amateur sound films; and views of the world from San Pietro to one-room schoolhouses in West Virginia. The effect of this collection as a whole is the sense of a fantastic panorama of a century. Throughout the spectacular assemblage one sees, always, the details. In the middle of a vast historical vista, suddenly an irreducible singularity, what Roland Barthes called a *punctum*. An expression or gesture, such as those on the faces of West Coast Japanese Americans before the war, unaware of the ways in which their lives were about to change. Insignificant details, minor gestures, and modes of behavior are suddenly transformed, through time, into archaeologies of the past, historiographies of life as such, but also of cinema.

Treasures effects at times, an ethnography, not only of peoples and cultures, customs and communities that have since disappeared, but also of cinema, of film, of the practice of filming and preserving. A historiography that is marked and at times scarred by the traversal of cinema, a medium that recorded and preserved but also illustrated and exposed the cultures that constitute the twentieth century. In *Treasures*, one finds the strange migration of individual films from archive to home, in some cases back home, to the place from which they originated. *Treasures from American Film Archives: 50 Preserved Films* provides the opportunity to view at once a past and future: a history of cinema, carried by the dynamic momentum of the twentieth century, and the future of a medium, a technology—digital video—that may, paradoxically, enhance the visibility of cinema, even as it gradually replaces film.

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Visual Digital Culture

Surface Play and Spectacle in New Media Genres

By Andrew Darley. New York: Routledge, 2000. $75.00 cloth; $22.99 paper.

Andrew Darley's *Visual Digital Culture* examines media such as video games, simulator rides, television commercials, music videos, and special venue attractions (like Imax

films and virtual reality), and attempts to define and describe an aesthetic common to them all. He also tries to place these media within a larger cultural framework, as well as situating them in postmodern theory.

The book's introduction begins with a well-articulated apologetics for the analyzing of digital spectacle and sets out the author's goal of understanding the aesthetics of form instead of merely doing an interpretation of content which ignores the differences between digital media and the traditional media that precede them. The first three chapters, grouped as "Part I: History," trace some of the genealogy and precursors of digital media, particularly in regard to the goals of illusion and realism. Darley makes a good argument, forging interesting links between new media and old media such as dioramas, amusement parks, early cinema, and other forms of turn-of-the-century spectacle. There is a lot to cover and, as is the case elsewhere in the book, there are generalizations and omissions. For example, he concentrates on comparing spectacle-based media at the turn of the twentieth century and the "resurgence of spectacle today" at the turn of the twentyfirst century, but little is said about the mid-century resurgence which included such things as widescreen, 3-D, Cinerama, the opening of Disneyland, and so forth. Chapter 3 turns toward the cultural aspects of digital media, and provides a good theoretical context for the media being discussed, drawing mainly from Baudrillard, Jameson, and Eco, with effective summaries of their ideas.

The second part of the book, on aesthetics, is where Darley begins examining digital media. He compares them and teases out the similarities and shared aesthetic concepts that link them, including the way image and technique become more important than content and meaning, the waning of narrative, the decentering of authorship, and other aspects involving simulation, hyperrealism, hybridization, interactivity, "surface play," depthlessness, and repetition. Some of the main ideas are repeated and some of the discussion is only superficial, but much of it is thought-provoking, and other examples of what he is writing about come to mind easily enough. Occasionally, though, his technical knowledge seems a little weak. For example, he states that "computer generated imagery is iconic, never indexical" (88), because it is not a direct recording in the way that photography is, leaving out such things as motion-capture, the digitizing of models, and image- and texture-mapping, all of which are ways that the digital image can be linked to referents. In another discussion, he consigns all of *Toy Story* (1995) to the same plane of "second-order realism" without considering the different levels of realism within the film (nor does the film fit the "waning of narrative" as well as the other media do). Still, the more general analysis pertaining to spectacle and surface play here is useful and interesting. He does acknowledge, too, that some of the overarching aesthetic principles he supposes do not always apply, but they are nevertheless common enough for many of his points to remain valid. While the section of chapter 6 on digital effects in cinema is far too short and cursory, the sections on the decentering of authorship and the connections between digital media and modernist art are rather good.

The book's third part, on spectatorship, is the strongest one. In chapter 7, Darley compares the role of the spectator in regard to video games and simulator rides, and looks at interactivity and immersion in mass entertainment. He sees interactivity as "a distinctive mode of *relating* to audio-visual representations or fictions" (156), and through this idea discusses "vicarious kinaesthesia" and the nature of the spectator's experience in these media. The only problem with the chapter is its somewhat simplistic view of video games, which today are more semantically dense and complex than he imagines them to be. At one time much of what he says was true, but games have developed a good deal over the past decade. Chapter 8 continues the discussion of spectatorship, with a look at public versus private consumption, again bringing in postmodern theory. The section on the "society of the spectacle" (185-88) contains a nice review of the literature surrounding the topic, relating the ideas of various theorists to each other.

Overall, the book makes some good points about digital media and examines connections between them in interesting ways. Unfortunately, the writing is often clunky and occasionally stilted. Sentences are heavy with appositives, parenthetical statements, and dashed asides, sometimes making for a slow read that is much sinew and little meat. Also, from the book's title onward, there is the confused use of the word genre, used to mean variously medium, mode of production, and form, as well as its usual meaning (even worse, digital cinema is at one point referred to as a subgenre).

At times Darley sounds like an outsider looking in, rather than someone intimately familiar with his subject matter. Some common terms in the field appear in quotes (i.e., special effects, morphing, ILM) as though they were new to the author, and errors in names and dates make one suspect that his research was not very thorough (for example, he refers to the Universal Studios theme park as Universal Film Lot, and claims *Myst* [1993] appeared in 1995; two years in a long time to be off by, as far as CD-ROM history is concerned). He even has the famous first Lumière screening of 1895 taking place in 1896. These errors may seem small, but after a certain number of them accumulate, they do reveal a lack of precision and attention to detail and make the book seem like armchair theory done from memory or at some remove from the material being studied.

But the biggest oversights are those media that ought to have been discussed but remain conspicuously absent. Although Darley takes visual digital culture as the book's topic, there is no mention of the World Wide Web (despite a chapter subtitled "Surfing the Image"), or the huge on-line role-playing games such as *Ultima Online* or *Asheron's Call* that each have about 200,000 players and would fit well into discussions of spectacle and interactivity. Sit-in and ride-on types of video games would further strengthen the link he makes between video games and simulator rides, but there is no mention of them either.

Despite its shortcomings, however, *Visual Digital Culture* does have some good points and a thoughtful approach which acknowledges the need for new ways of theorizing the aesthetics of newer media. Regarding his book, Darley

himself says in the conclusion, "I would be the first to admit that it has only begun to scratch the surfaces that it is attempting to understand" (196). Readers looking for a more in-depth technical discussion of new technology will not find much here, but for those outside the field the book presents a good introduction to some of the issues involved. Darley asks some important questions toward the end of the conclusion, and if nothing else, his book adds to the debate and discussion surrounding new forms of media that have only begun to be explored theoretically.

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Wildlife Films

By Derek Bousé. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000. $55.00 cloth; $22.50 paper.

Many years ago, one of my graduate students in documentary film studies wanted to write her thesis on ethical issues in wildlife films. Not knowing much more than the documentary classics (*Chang*, *Grass*) and some actual wildlife films (including works by Frank Buck, Disney live-actions, and a few television programs), I discouraged her and told her she should work on the ethics of documentary films that use human subjects. I made a mistake. But I only realize it now, after having read Derek Bousé's fascinating new book, *Wildlife Films*.

Bousé is himself a wildlife filmmaker who has a doctorate in communications and has taught at the university level. His knowledge of film in general and documentary in particular is impressive. He traces the history of wildlife and natural history in literature and film from Aristotle's *Historia animalium* and Pliny's *Historia naturalis* to the nineteenth-century literary works that greatly affected wildlife films when they began—with Muybridge and Edison (*Studies of Foreshortenings*, 1879; *Electrocuting an Elephant*, 1903)—and up to the present-day television nature shows and Imax extravaganzas. He argues that wildlife films raise similar ethical and substantive issues to those in documentary films with human subjects. Bousé has convincingly persuaded this reader of the value of studying wildlife films as a unique genre with its own history, formal considerations, and ethical issues, a genre important for what it reveals both about the people who made the films and about the animal subjects.

Not only does Bousé provide a fascinating history of wildlife films, he also explicates why those films have evolved as they have by explaining the aesthetics, politics, and economics of the wildlife film industry in the United States and Great Britain. Bousé reminds us that the true guiding light for the production of nature films is not so much the urge to inform or teach as an increasing desire to entertain and tell a story. While most documentaries, like fiction films, do tell a story, there are many that do not. These films often have a mosaic rather than a linear narrative structure; they include Wiseman's "institutional investigation" films (*High School*, 1968; *Juvenile Court*, 1973), the so-called city films (Ruttmann's *Berlin: Symphony of a City*, 1927; Vigo's *A Propos de Nice*, 1930), and experimental documentaries (Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera*, 1929; Harris's *E Minha Cara/That's My Face*, 2001).

Bousé contends that wildlife films are a genre unto themselves, rather than documentaries: "I argue that they are primarily narrative entertainments that usually steer clear of social and environmental issues" (xiv). The need to tell a story leads, according to Bousé, to anthropomorphizing the animals, setting up shots so that more "action" will occur on the screen, and manipulating "actuality" (to use the term John Grierson chose when defining documentary) so that, for instance, animals that would normally never be found in close proximity to each other in the wild are brought together to fight, or one or two birds or animals are digitally multiplied to look like a huge flock or herd. Wildlife films show nature "close up, speeded up and set to music with reality's most exciting moments highlighted and its boring bits cut out" (3). Among films the author assigns to this genre are Walt Disney's *Seal Island* (1948)—the first of his "True Life Adventures"—*Born Free* (1966), *The Life of Birds* (1988), and the IMAX film *Whales* (1999). Bousé details the checkered history of the manipulation of nature films through editing and scripting unfettered by any of the checks or controls in films with human subjects.

Bousé emphasizes that the producers, directors, and film and television executives of wildlife films are more often than not—and in keeping with most of the rest of the industry—interested in the bottom line, convinced that in order to appeal to a large audience wildlife films must not only tell a story, but also have a hero, mimic a human family, show or tell how animals have the same emotions and desires as humans, and reach a moral conclusion. When developing its wildlife series "True Life Adventures," the Disney organization was careful to follow the same narrative structure and themes that had brought them great financial rewards with *Bambi*. Bousé's analysis of the 1942 animated feature is telling. Although Disney never disabused anyone of the notion that he had invented Bambi and the story of a loveable creature in a beautiful forest whose mother is killed by a man, the tale in fact goes back to 1923 Vienna and a story written by Felix Salten. Disney changed the intellectual, politically charged original into a sentimental tale where all animals are seen in human terms and thus, according to Bousé, made *Bambi* into a model for many subsequent wildlife films.

In discussing the ethics of audience manipulation in wildlife films, Bousé defines "blue chip wildlife films" as having at least seven criteria and functioning as fantasies of the natural world. Among other things, they feature large animals, a dramatic narrative line, and an absence of science, politics, historical reference points, and people—or at least white people. These blue-chip films raise ethical questions not only about how the filmmakers treat their subjects, but also about how they manipulate their audiences, audiences

who have come to expect that wildlife films will be just like everything else they see in theaters and on television—except of course for the animals.

Although Bousé does not go so far as to suggest informed consent for the subjects of wildlife films, he asks the reader to consider points that would give pause to those familiar with ethical considerations for human subjects. Should there, for example, be a fairer way of depicting subjects of wildlife films? Another question Bousé raises may make a difference in how animal subjects are treated and portrayed: Should these films be made by scientists rather than by filmmakers untrained in animal sciences who only consider themselves to be "naturalists"? Bousé points out how infrequently wildlife films use the services and advice of scientists. (Jay Ruby raised a similar issue when he argued in various publications that anthropological films should be made by trained anthropologists, not just by filmmakers who might have an interest in a particular culture or society.)

Derek Bousé has masterfully illuminated, catalogued, and categorized wildlife literature and film from its inception to the present day in clear, succinct prose. His argument that wildlife film is a unique genre is cogent, exhaustive, and persuasive. *Wildlife Films* is a worthwhile volume for anyone interested in the films themselves or in documentaries, the film or television industry, and cultural studies. This book will make the reader want to see, with a more critical eye, many of the films that its author discusses.

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Word and Image in Japanese Cinema

Edited by Dennis Washburn and Carole Cavanaugh. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001. $59.95.

The essays in this compilation on Japanese cinema are written by contributors from the academic disciplines of cinema studies and literary studies. According to Washburn and Cavanaugh's introduction, the essays in Part One, "Wording the Image/Imaging the Word," all focus on the relationship between word and image, especially literary text and film, and how this relationship is constructed in film amidst modern Japanese culture. In Part Two, "Reflections of Identity," the essays analyze films having certain shared images that define cultural identity in Japan. In the last part, "Outside the Frame of Culture," the essays deal with films having various forms of resistance toward the totalizing aspects of a unitary cultural identity. Washburn and Cavanaugh also assert that "we were motivated in part by a desire for an interdisciplinary collection, but more important, we wanted to highlight the space between word and image" (xxv).

Although the editors foreground "word and image" as their core concept, after reading through the book one might question why that should be such a central issue now. Their rationalization is that

> the very notion of separating word and image, or of consciously bringing them together seamlessly in the realism of cinema, are alien to traditional Japanese aesthetics. And so perhaps the effort to negotiate the newly opened space between words and images, between narrative and spectacle, is more urgent in Japan than in other cultures, especially those of Europe, where word and image had parted ways long before the advent of the technology of the motion picture. (xxii)

While I have no interest in verifying or disproving their hypothesis, I am rather inclined to attribute the emphasis on word and image to the current state of Japanese cinema studies itself, since except for Part One, many of the essays are hardly concerned with the space of word and image.

Recently, the institutional landscape of Japanese cinema scholarship has been changing dramatically. Despite the fact that the field of Japanese cinema studies has been leveling off or rather disappearing from the territory of cinema studies, especially in comparison with Chinese cinema studies, since the late 1980s, more academics research and teach Japanese film than ever before. In the cross-disciplinary transformations of the new academy, Japanese film has been reconfigured as an easily accessible object of study. But the editors' centering on word and image smoothes over, however unintentionally, the more troubling aspects of the dissemination of Japanese cinema studies across literary disciplines. The book's interdisciplinary strain in particular belies the negative legacy of both the longstanding neglect of Japanese film in Japanese studies, as well as the more recent co-optation of Japanese film.

I was curious to see how this academic transformation contributed to the discipline of Japanese cinema studies in this book, and found a welcome break from entrenched perspectives—those "outside views" which assume a monolithic and impenetrable version of culture. Ironically, this break goes against the sort of Japanese film scholarship asserted by Donald Richie in his foreword to the book: "All Western views of the Japanese film are, by definition, outside. . . . [The connotative quality] is often one that the foreigner cannot, for cultural reasons, decipher. . . . If we are creatures of our culture, then scholars of different cultural backgrounds manifest different ways of thinking that cause them to interpret differently" (xiii-xvi). Despite the fact that many of the contributing authors can be considered "Western view-" holders in one way or another, some of them succeed in showing the possibility of breaking these constructed barriers and revealing the ephemeral nature of cultural boundaries—if indeed such things exist at all.

There are four essays which, to varying degrees, manage to challenge the limitations of the informed outsider position. In "The Word Before the Image: Criticism, the Screenplay, and the Regulation of Meaning in Prewar Japanese Film Culture," Aaron Gerow states that "the relationship between film and literature is certainly the most prominent

example of such interaction between word and image, but it would be restricting to reduce our conception of such intercourse to only literary adaptation in cinema or to the 'visuality' of the modern novel" (3). Gerow develops the cultural nexus of early Japanese cinema to encompass film criticism, screenplay, and filmic law. His thorough research on historical writing, newspapers, and the early film magazines such as *Katsudo shashinkai* (*Moving Picture World*) makes his writing on the early cinema solid and persuasive. An historical approach using Japanese-language materials may sound basic, yet it is the sort of good scholarship that has often been lacking in Japanese cinema studies.

Charles Shiro Inouye's essay, "In the Show House of Modernity: Exhaustive Listing in Itami Juzo's *Ta[m]popo*," foregrounds the unexpected connection between a contemporary film and Edo narratives such as Takizawa Bakin's fictions and Katsushika Hokusai's pictures, which use two-dimensional figures to tell stories. Inouye demonstrates the relation between the film and the literary texts: "This readjustment of narratively deployed signs inevitably took place within the development of motion pictures, as the medium progressed from silent film, to talkies, to films such as Itami Juzo's *Ta[m]popo*, with its mix of syntactic and paratactic narrative styles" (131). It is arguable, however, whether these narrative signs had such a persistent, unchanging influence on Japanese cinema throughout its over 100-year history. In other words, Inouye's homogenization of Japanese film history or film's historical development makes one wonder about the inevitability of his connection between traditional literary narrative and film, and further begs the questions: Why Itami, why *Tampopo*, and why 1986? Still, Inouye's analysis provokes us to see the further possibility of studying Japanese cinema within the cultural nexus, especially in the bridge with Japanese literary traditions. His specific case of Edo narrative tradition's influence on a Japanese comedy film transcends Noël Burch's rather irresponsible attempt at making similar connections between traditional Japanese culture and modern films.

By focusing on a 1950s cultural icon, Michael Raine's "Ishihara Yujiro: Youth, Celebrity, and the Male Body in Late-1950s Japan" presents a fundamental problem for existing tendencies in Japanese cinema studies:

> Japanese film study in the West has concentrated excessively on the art cinema and on the individual textual analysis. Yet the real interest of the Japanese program picture is distributed across a web of texts, filmic or otherwise, rather than being located in unitary moments. We need to trace that web if we are to understand cultural change in late-1950s Japan. (202)

The most admirable aspect of Raine's essay is exactly this attempt to map the complex web of popular culture (a formidable task by any measure) in order to reveal how the media constructed viewership. This methodology completely dismisses the preconception that "all Western views are outside," which may at first seem a modest position, yet at the same time functions as a self-defense—I am an outsider so therefore I can only see from a Western point of view. Raine's essay also signals the end of the critical approach that says, "Let me help you, Western readers, to know about Japanese cinema and culture." The essay indicates not only the necessity of expanding Japanese cinema studies from canonical filmic text to program pictures, but also the value of seeing culture provisionally constructed in the play between media and viewers.

The most inspired essay in the book is "Piss and Run: Or How Ozu Does a Number on SCAP," by Edward Fowler. Fowler re-reads Ozu Yasujiro's *Record of a Tenement Gentleman* (1947)—he insists on employing his own title translation, *A Who's Who of the Tenement*—in the cultural context of Allied censorship of Japanese cinema during the Occupation. This essay provides us the pleasure of solving a riddle in the film, which up to now has been assessed as only a work from Ozu's transitional period leading to the postwar masterpieces. Fowler uncovers the xenophobic message hidden in the double layers of a story and a film:

> If, as I believe he did, Ozu succeeded in communicating an extraordinarily blunt and indeed xenophobic message to his Japanese audience without getting caught by his American one, it is because the director managed to disguise that message in a way that made his respective audiences focus on essentially two different stories. (278)

Although his hypothesis that the two different audiences read two different stories is debatable, since apparently no postwar contemporary Japanese film critic pointed out the quite delightful xenophobic message, Fowler's play with the layers of the film's spectatorial regime is worth taking seriously here. He writes that

> I use the word *we* advisedly, for I refer not simply to the fiction by which we Americans vicariously appropriate the role of a Japanese national watching a first-run Ozu film of the postwar period more than half a century after its release. I refer as well to our seemingly improbable, yet in fact crucial, role of intended audience; for it turns out that we Americans, *as Americans*, have been implicated in its viewing—have indeed been constructed as viewing subjects—from the very beginning. (275)

On any level of reading film, we hypothesize this intended audience, and yet it is ironical enough to see that "we Americans" read Ozu's xenophobic message on behalf of postwar Japanese. Indeed, the very act of Fowler's reading challenges the assumption that all Western views are synonymous with an outsider's perspective; such a reading diminishes the comforts of that privileged remove.

Although the book is expensive for an introductory Japanese film course, many of the contributors' analyses of subtitled Japanese films are a welcome teaching resource. Essays in this category are Linda C. Ehrlich and Antonio Santos's work on *Woman in the Dunes*, Kathe Geist on *The Makioka Sisters*, Carole Cavanaugh on *Black Rain*, Leger Grindon on *The Realm of the Senses*, and Dennis Washburn

on *Vengeance Is Mine*. In addition, we are offered the gifts of analyses on films which have rarely been seen or discussed outside Japan: Keiko I. McDonald introduces films by the neglected master Shimizu Hiroshi; Richard Torrance looks at the social history connected with the Tora-san series and tracks changes in the films' discourse of class consciousness; and Susan Napia analyzes "Japanimation" from the last two decades within a discourse of the female body and the ongoing transformation of women's roles in Japan.

At the end, we may return to the questions of how recent academic shifts have contributed to the discipline of Japanese cinema studies, and to what degree that is reflected in this book. Japanese literary studies' disciplinary emphasis on mastering language, which for too long was the exception in cinema studies, definitely provides scholars with wider access to the "cultural web," yet we can only anticipate the direction which Japanese cinema studies will take, and in that sense, this book is still a beginning—but it's a great start nonetheless.

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Writing Himself into History

Oscar Micheaux, His Silent Films, and His Audience

By Pearl Bowser and Louise Spence. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2001. $52.00 cloth; $20.00 paper.

The back-cover blurbs of Pearl Bowser and Louise Spence's literary and cinematic biography of the African-American filmmaker Oscar Micheaux testify to a general feeling among students of Micheaux's work that it was "eagerly anticipated" and expected to be of "immeasurable importance." The authors have not disappointed their readership. Even the thoughtful foreword by Thulani Davis is of the same high order.

Bowser and Spence belong to a small group of faithful Micheaux scholars who have struggled to restore him to a place in the history of American popular culture. The former is a lifelong collector of black cinematic ephemera and curator/programmer of the film work of many African-American cinéastes; the latter is Coordinator of Media Studies at Sacred Heart University in Connecticut. Together they have stalked Micheaux in his every known habitat, from the Dakota prairie (where he homesteaded on the Rosebud reservation) to the most urban centers of American moviemaking and moviegoing. Partly as a result of their labors (and of others pursuing the same goals), Micheaux, who had been lost from view for most of this past century, has enjoyed a restoration of sorts: Hollywood's Directors Guild of America (which would never have given him a card in his lifetime) gave him a lifetime achievement award; he now has a star embedded in the Hollywood Boulevard sidewalk; in South Dakota he has been proclaimed a genuine "pioneer" and an annual film festival is held in his memory; and archivists persist in their hunt for prints of his presumed lost movies.

Micheaux was a complex and elusive figure, but the authors have nailed him in all of his fabled eccentricity. Like many an autodidact, the qualities of Micheaux's mind, his courtly manners, his eclectic worldview, his extravagant language (both oral and visual) arose from the resources at hand rather than from a formal education. He seemed almost like a model for Claude Lévi-Strauss's "bricoleur"—the artful handyman-who-made-do. He invented a self-proclaimed, self-advertised persona whose pragmatic roles embraced the crafts of entrepreneur, hustler, untutored aesthete, cinéaste, and poseur (a vital role so that his circle would know he had class). And for the benefit of white people, whether investors in his films or censors who seemed hell-bent on shredding them, he flashed his trickster mode: Br'er Rabbit in a tweed suit, high collar, and an invincible coool! Always, as they said in the 1920s, he was "a good race man." In his very first forays into the big time, his panache revealed itself in his plans: move from Sioux City to Chicago where he could better promote his eventually seven novels, get in touch with movie men, and "get a Dodge Roadster" (11).

His story, at least in the beginning, is startlingly like that of any number of Hollywood moguls. They abandoned their roots in haberdashery, scavenging for rags and scrap iron, and running crummy nickelodeons, that is, hustling—no other term fits. They soared to the top, and only a few of them—William Fox and Joseph Schenck come to mind—went to jail. The difference between the moguls and Micheaux was that he "could not pass the physical," that is, he was *black*.

How to tell this story, particularly in an age when narrative itself is seen as a seamless trick played on the reader, who is unable to break in and debate with the author? Bowser and Spence divide their work into thematic sections on Micheaux the man in his time, the sociology of his black audience, and a probing inquiry into his three extant silent "texts" (movies), while managing to hold to a vaguely discernible story line. They accomplish this by creating a "Grand Narrative"—the term is Jean-François Lyotard's—that embraces African-American life and culture and which thereby serves as the engine driving their account of both the course of black history and of Micheaux himself. Yet this narrative mode by no means constrains the authors' tools of analysis or theory: they blessedly keep theorists below decks in the footnotes, where they provide exposition as needed without slowing the flow.

As for Micheaux's place in the story, he is both located within the author's Grand Narrative and also set within his own life span. The history is familiar to even the general reader in African-American literature. It begins with "the great migration" from the rural South, first to Southern cities, then northward, often at the behest of Northern advertisers for workers to augment manpower that had first been stretched by a booming industrial economy and then thinned by the military demands of the Great War. Thereafter, a "New Negro," however poor, with the price of a ticket in his pocket provided Micheaux with an audience. The authors freshen this story not only by referring to the dozens of admirable monographs on the emerging black urban ghettos, but also

by plowing yet again the unindexed pages of the African-American press.

More than any other group of scholars, those studying Micheaux and his circle have trolled the records of the various state boards of movie censors in search of debates over the body of his work. As the historical source, these archives are a delicious source of the interplay between Micheaux and ordinary white people: almost all of the censors were garden-variety bluenoses, bible-thumpers, or political hacks, joined occasionally by a black preacher. Their denials of licenses to exhibit or their demands for cuts of sequences that in their opinion challenged the racial status quo gave Micheaux a platform from which to address future historians about his work. As a sidebar to this main story, the archives also reveal the trickster under Micheaux's sober exterior; when debate failed, he simply ran his movies unlicensed or even faked licenses and spliced them between his leader and his main titles. We are in the authors' debt, not so much because they found these sources (they have been known and used for years), but because they have marshalled them as a means of access to this combative Micheaux who might otherwise not have surfaced.

The final section of *Writing Himself into History* is a close working of Micheaux's surviving silent canon: *Within Our Gates* (1920), *The Symbol of the Unconquered* (1920), and *Body and Soul* (1925). *Within Our Gates* and *Body and Soul* have already entered the literature, the former as Micheaux's putative "answer" to D.W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation*, particularly with respect to its justification of lynching, and the latter as Paul Robeson's entry into the cinema after he had already established a place for himself in African-American lore as an All-American football player and an emerging theatrical presence. Holding to their stated purpose of seeing black culture in the round as well as in the midst of a larger American life, the authors apply the same method to these few movies. Hence the films' meaning arises from their status both as texts and as artifacts of storied times of the Harlem Renaissance and the Jazz Age. That is, they are seen as themselves and in their times rather than as case studies or exemplars of this or that notion of a black aesthetic, or more evidence that Hollywood was a *bête blanche* in conflict with black aspiration, or as makeweights in yet another exercise in vulgarizing Marx or Freud or some other misused figure from history. In short, they worked to get the story straight, not, to be sure, the *only* story, but surely their *own* story.

Could a reader wish for more? Perhaps. In *Within Our Gates*, for example, and in *Body and Soul*, Micheaux invokes the spirits of Booker T. Washington and Frederick Douglass. The authors take up the notion of influences on Micheaux's life and work, but it might have been interesting to know of contemporaries with whom he spoke or whom he read. Another angle might have been a more systematic working of the identity of the audiences. We know that theater men advertised the gentility and elegance of their auditoriums. But it would have been good to know more of the black bourgeois resistance to movies, not so much W.E.B. DuBois's "talented tenth" (who have left us a dense paper trail), but rather the parents in families of the churched, affiliated, and employed who often said a resounding No! to the kids' pleas to go see those racy, unsettling Micheaux movies.

The back of the book includes a predictably solid bibliography, useful expository footnotes, a thoughtfully ordered index, and well-chosen stills, frame enlargements, and advertising ephemera, much of it credited to Bowser's own African Diaspora Images collection.

Thomas Cripps, retired University Distinguished Professor at Morgan State University, has written five books, among them *Slow Fade to Black: The Negro in American Film, 1900-1942*, and many articles, reviews, and television scripts, including *Black Shadows on a Silver Screen* (1976), which won medals in several international film festivals.

Book Notes

Contributor to Book Notes: **Tony Williams** teaches in the English Department at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale.

Pykett, Derek. *Michael Ripper Unmasked*. Baltimore, MD: Midnight Marquee Press, 1999. Published a year before its subject's demise, this is a fond biography of a well-known British screen character actor. No Hammer film would have been complete without an appearance by this very familiar face, whether as a drunken graverobber in *The Revenge of Frankenstein* (1958) or the browbeaten Longbarrow in *The Mummy's Shroud* (1966). Born in 1913, Michael Ripper had a long life in British film, theater, and television. Despite Robert Montgomery's attempt to launch him as a leading actor in *Your Witness* (1950), he was doomed because of its box-office failure to a career of supporting roles. However, he would go on to become an indispensable icon in many Hammer horror productions, to the extent that his often brief presence would draw comments of recognition and applause from audiences. *Michael Ripper Unmasked* represents the type of study which more people should undertake and rarely do—except in the type of community represented by *Psychotronic*. This is one of Midnight Marquee's better publications; it also contains credits for Ripper's many stage, screen, and TV performances.

Tony Williams

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